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THE BEST OF 2023

2024 THE YEAR AHEAD

Exclusive Interview

BANANARAMA

"WE DO THINGS IN OUR OWN TIME AND IN OUR OWN WAY. AFTER EVERYTHING WE'VE BEEN THROUGH, THAT'S BIG."

KEREN AND SARA ON HOW THEY'VE SURVIVED THE POP INDUSTRY MACHINE

CLASSIC ALBUM

STEVIE WONDER'S HOTTER THAN JULY

TREVOR HORN

"TWO TRIBES WAS LIKE DRIVING A CAR OFF A CLIFF!"

PET SHOP BOYS: ALBUM BY ALBUM

PLUS Black Grape • Top 20 remix albums • Pete Wylie • Peter Gabriel's i/o
The Colourfield's Virgins And Philistines • Holly Johnson • D:Ream
The Chemical Brothers • Portishead • All Saints + much more...

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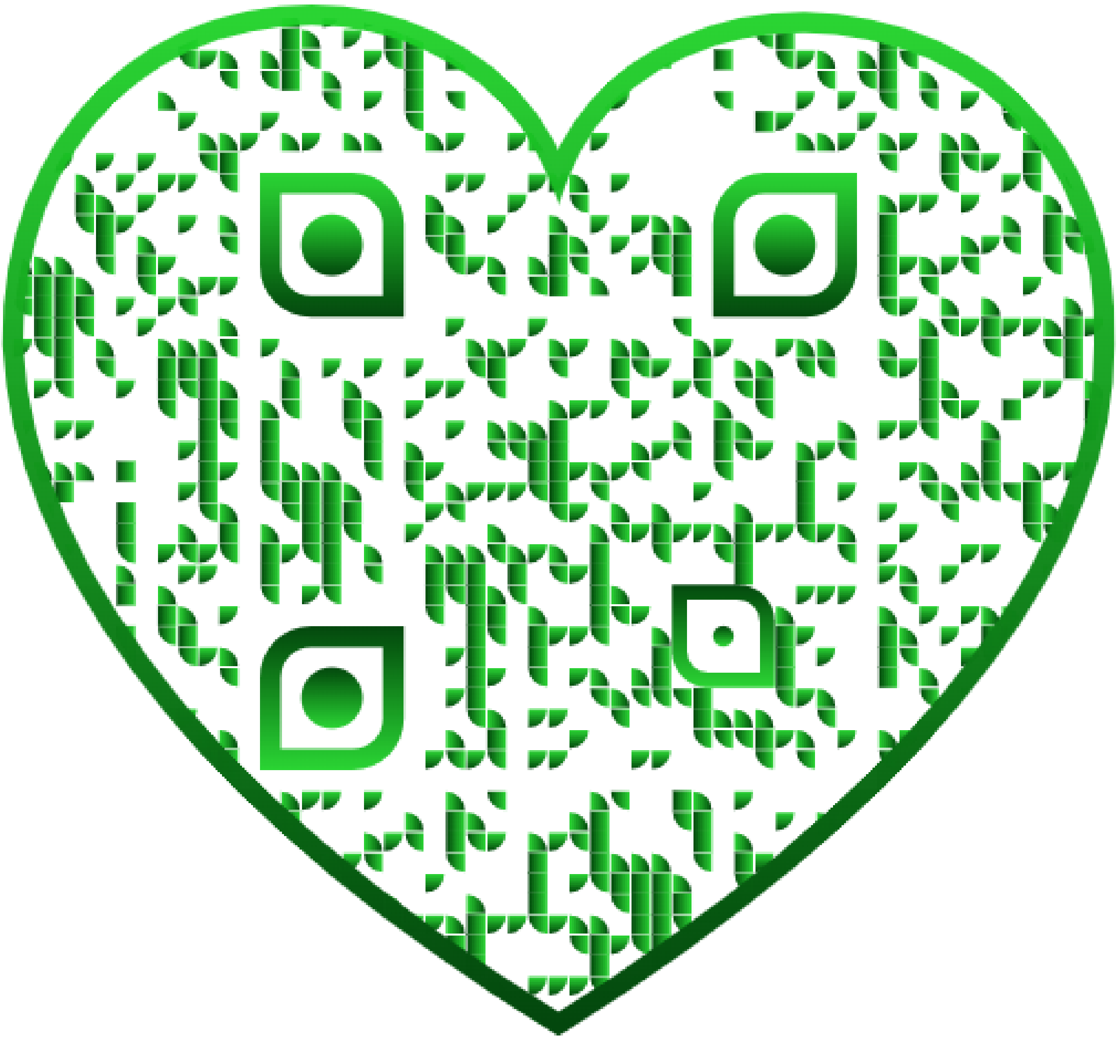

NOW YEARBOOK

THE STORY SO FAR

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CLASSIC POP

WELCOME

As you'll see by the strength of our 'Best of 2023' feature this issue, it's been a really solid year for a whole host of our favourite artists. We've covered it all here in *Classic Pop*, of course, via world exclusive A-list interviews with the likes of Duran Duran, Pet Shop Boys, The New Power Generation and Andrew Ridgeley to name just a handful, meaning you will always hear about the big-hitters in these pages first.

Apart from *CP*'s annual retrospective overview of what turned our heads across the last 12 months we're also looking forward to what is already shaping up to be a very busy 2024.

Leading the way are our iconic cover stars Bananarama who will not only grace the stage of the London Palladium for two 40th anniversary live shows in April, they'll also give their hits an orchestral makeover for the 80s Classical event in Leeds and appear as part of the latest series of Let's Rock festivals.

There is also the no small matter of their forthcoming career-spanning compilation release, *Glorious*, where Keren and Sara handpick 40 songs – 10 per decade – to celebrate their life in music.

This pop lark is a tough ol' business at the best of times and the pair's resilience has served them well. As the duo tell us in our exclusive cover feature interview, they've always stuck to their guns and never wavered in their joint artistic vision. It's an attitude that should be applauded. Pop trends may come and go but their classy songwriting has more than stood the test of time.

Elsewhere, we meet the sonic architect of the 80s himself, Trevor Horn, for what was originally meant to be solely a look at his new star-studded covers album, *Echoes*. But when Trevor also wanted to regale us with further tales of shaping Frankie classics, hitting the Big Apple with Malcolm McLaren and even impersonating Bryan Ferry on Woolworths soundalike albums back in the day then who are we to rein him in?

Meanwhile, Shaun Ryder swaps twistin' melons for another type of fruit with his latest release. Rebooting Black Grape, he returns with *Orange Head* – our new album of the issue, no less. We meet the Mondays' legend with his partner in rhyme, Kermit...

With their distinctive Mancunian tones still ringing in our ears, let me sign off by wishing you all a very happy and healthy holiday season. Thanks for all your support over the past year and here's to many more adventures chipping away at the coalface of pop in 2024. Enjoy the issue!

Steve Harnell, Editor

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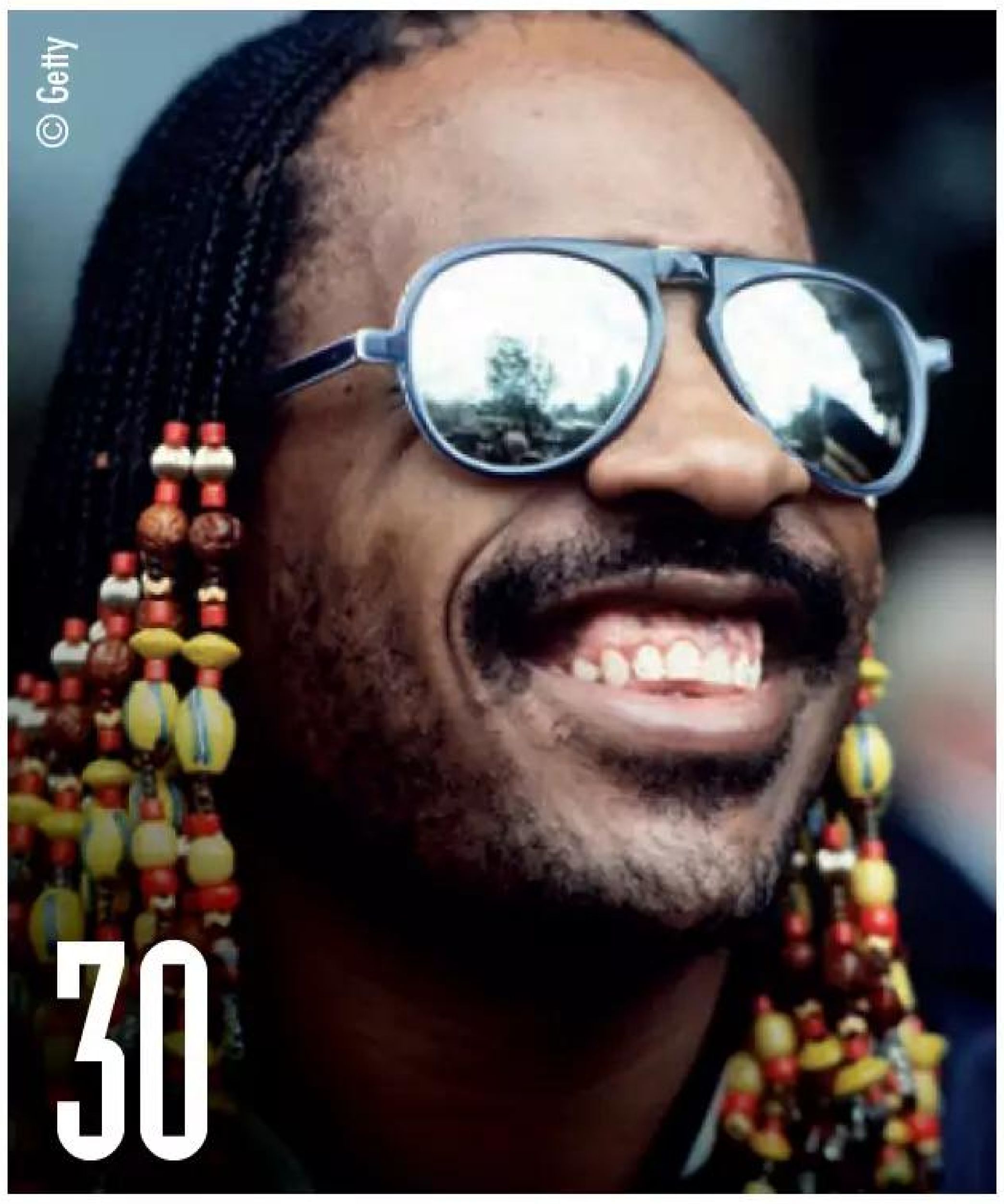

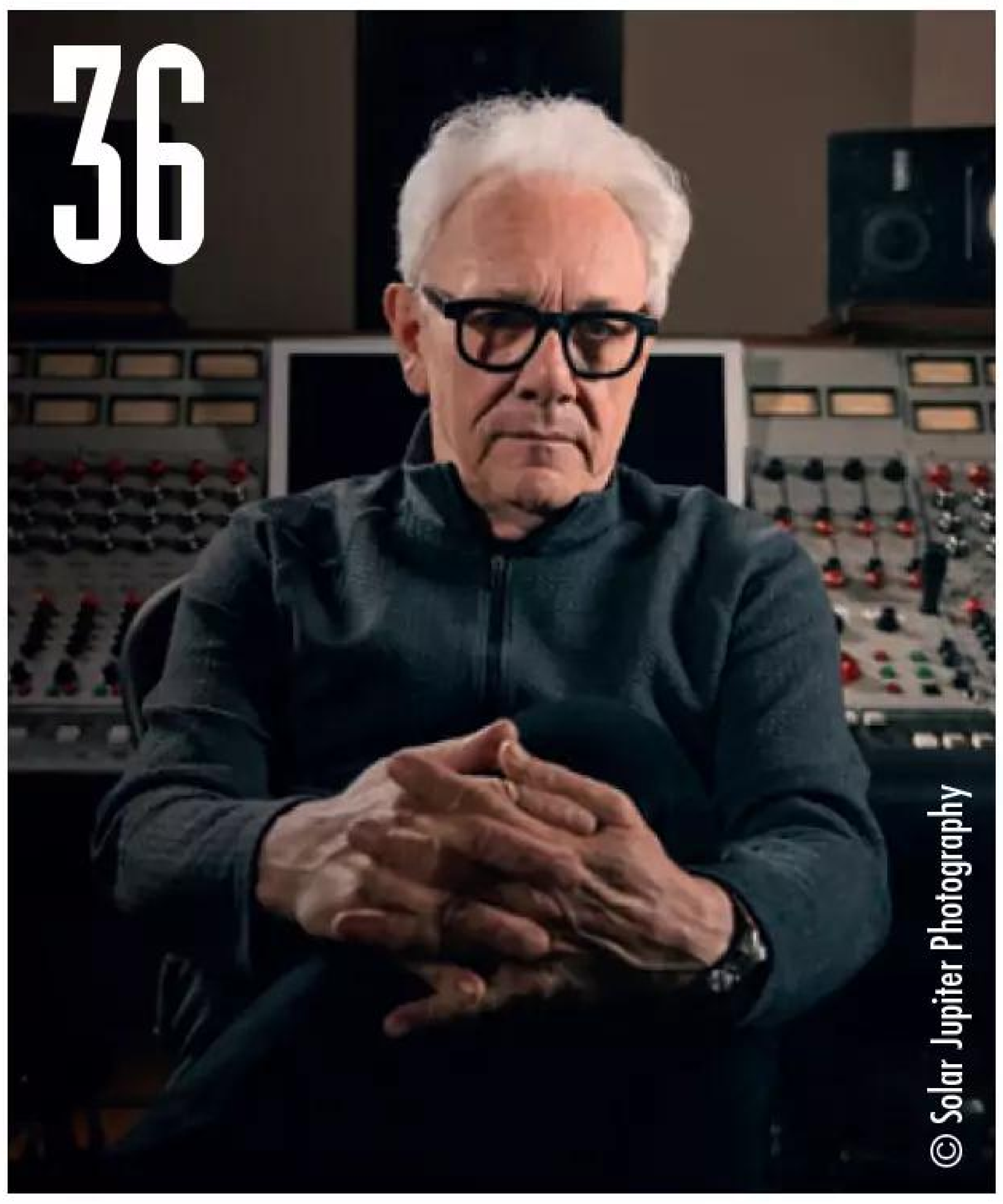

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© Josh Cheuse

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Anthem Publishing
Suite 6, Piccadilly House,
London Road, Bath, BA1 6PL
Tel +44 (0)1225 489 984
www.classicpopmag.com

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WHAT WAS YOUR MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT OF 2023?

EDITOR
Steve Harnell
steve.harnell@anthem.co.uk
Prince – *Diamonds And Pearls* boxset *1

SENIOR ART EDITOR
Alex Duce
alex.duce@anthem.co.uk
Depeche Mode – *Before We Drown*

ADVERTISING MANAGER
Leah Fitz-Henry
leah.fitz-henry@anthem.co.uk
Mel C at Camp Bestival

SUB-EDITOR
Rik Flynn
The Netflix Wham! documentary

SENIOR MARKETING EXECUTIVE
Rosie Pankhurst
rosie.pankhurst@anthem.co.uk
Kylie Minogue's *Tension* album

DIGITAL EDITOR
Steve O'Brien
The Netflix Wham! documentary *2

CREATIVE DIRECTOR **Jenny Cook**
jenny.cook@anthem.co.uk
Discovering the Tiny Desks concerts on YouTube

FOUNDER, EDITOR-AT-LARGE **Ian Peel**
Frankie Goes to Hollywood at Eurovision

CEO **Jon Bickley**
jon.bickley@anthem.co.uk
Madonna's The Celebration Tour

MANAGING DIRECTOR **Simon Lewis**
simon.lewis@anthem.co.uk
OMD's *Bauhaus Staircase* album

CONTRIBUTORS

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*4 "A euphoric end to the band's 40th anniversary tour – less a gig, more of a communal transcendental experience."
*5 "After her brush with death in the summer, it's been amazing to see Madonna back onstage with an incredible autobiographical show playing songs that fans have been desperate to see performed for years/decades."
*6 "An unexpected but triumphant return from the musical chameleons."
*7 "100% goosebumps."
*8 "Proof that 80s indie (The Smiths, New Order, The Cure) can be updated and made fresh by people not even born back then."
*9 "So gratifying to see veteran bands at the height of their powers!"

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OUR CONTRIBUTORS

The winner of the Best Writer, Specialist category, in 2022's British Society of Magazine Editors Awards, our latest issue sees **John Earls** meet Sara Dallin and Keren Woodward for our exclusive cover feature with Bananarama, plus he catches up with Pete Wylie and oversees our new albums and reissues reviews sections.

Simon Price is the author of *Everything (A Book About Manic Street Preachers)* and *Curepedia – An A-Z Of The Cure*. He worked at *Melody Maker* for nine years, the *Independent On Sunday* for 12, and now debuts for *Classic Pop*, where hearing Trevor Horn's Elvis impression in the course of his first assignment was not on his 2023 bingo card – but it's a life of surprises.

Steve O'Brien has written for such publications as *The Guardian*, *Radio Times*, *The New Statesman* and *Empire*. For *Classic Pop*, he catches up this issue with Shaun Ryder and Kermit as they return with our best new album of the issue, the storming *Orange Head*. The lifelong Whovian also interviews the eighth Doctor, actor Paul McGann, for our *My Pop Life* feature.

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Sun	13	**Newcastle** O_2 City Hall
Tue	15	**Stoke** Regent Theatre
Thu	17	**Nottingham** Royal Concert Hall
Fri	18	**York** Barbican
Sat	19	**Liverpool** M&S Bank Arena
Mon	21	**Llandudno** Venue Cymru Theatre
Tue	22	**Leicester** De Montfort Hall
Wed	23	**Cambridge** Corn Exchange
Fri	25	**Ipswich** Regent
Sat	26	**Southend** Cliffs Pavilion
Sun	27	**Southampton** Mayflower
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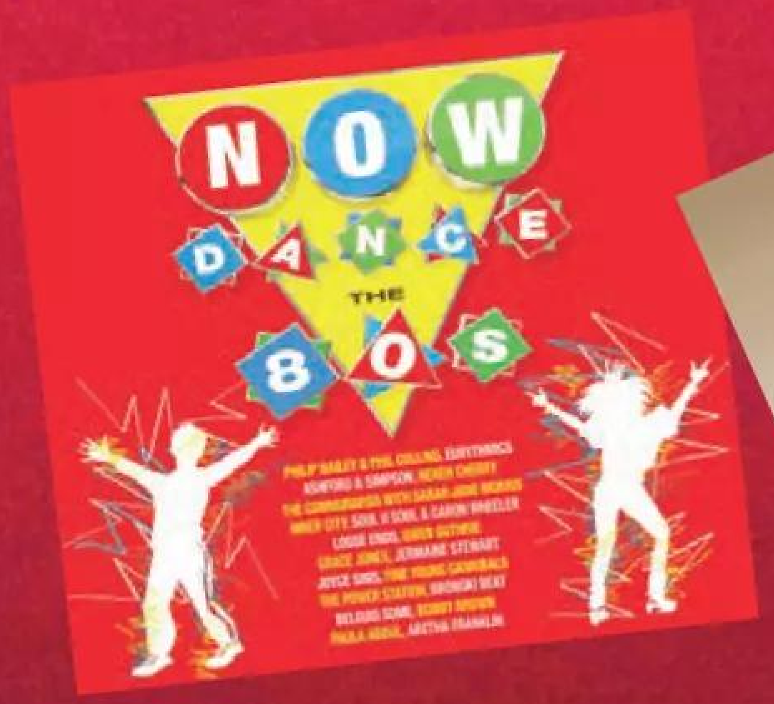

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Girls Aloud will reunite for a live tour in 2024 – but no new music is expected

GIRLS ALOUD REUNION TOUR WILL BE DEDICATED TO SARAH HARDING

Girls Aloud are to reform for a major tour of the UK and Ireland in 2024. The Girls Aloud Show reunites Cheryl, Nadine Coyle, Nicola Roberts and Kimberley Walsh and will be dedicated to former bandmate Sarah Harding, who died of cancer in 2021.

Speaking about the new tour, Cheryl explains: "We all started talking about the possibility of doing something to celebrate Girls Aloud's 20-year anniversary a few years ago. The anniversary seemed like an obvious thing that we would celebrate. But when Sarah fell ill all priorities changed. She passed away a year before the anniversary and it just didn't feel right, it felt too soon. But now, I think there's an energy that makes it feel right. It's the right time to celebrate Sarah, it's the right time to celebrate the band and the right time to celebrate the fact we can still do this 21 years later."

"Girls Aloud are a band that made such a huge impact on people's lives," adds Nadine Coyle. "We grew up with the band, but so did so many other people. So for us not to do something again feels like such a shame and a waste. We want to have that moment with fans where we can all enjoy it together."

The quartet made their first public appearance to plug the reunion tour on Zoe Ball's Radio 2 Breakfast show.

It's 21 years since the group of five then-teenagers was formed on ITV's talent show *Popstars: The Rivals*. The format was that the group would be pitted against a 'rival' boyband, One True Voice, with both acts competing for the Christmas No.1 slot. In the end,

Girls Aloud shortly after their formation on *Popstars: The Rivals* in 2002

© Getty

The girls announced the big news on BBC Radio 2's Zoe Ball show

© The Zoe Ball Breakfast Show on BBC Radio 2 and BBC Sounds

Girls Aloud triumphed, with debut 45 *Sound Of The Underground* beating One True Voice's double A-sided *Sacred Trust/After You're Gone.*

During their 10-year career, Girls Aloud notched up 21 Top 10 singles and four No.1s including *I'll Stand By You, Walk This Way* (with Sugababes) and the BRIT award-winning *The Promise.* Their 2003 debut album, *Sound Of The Underground,* was certified platinum while fifth and final LP, *Out Of Control,* went to No.1 in 2008.

"Over the last year, we've felt this outpouring of love – obviously towards Sarah, but actually towards all of us," explains Kimberley Walsh. "And I guess it ignited something in all of us again. It feels like something has changed and it does feel like the right time to celebrate Sarah and the 20-year anniversary that we didn't celebrate at the time."

Nicola Roberts adds: "What's really encouraging is that whenever people ask us about reuniting it's not, 'Would you guys ever do it?' but 'When are you guys gonna do it?' To know we still have that love from our fans and people who watched us grow up gives us the confidence to do the tour. It will be a massive celebration of everything we've done up to this point. We want people to leave being like, 'Wow, I've just had one of the best nights of my life.'"

> "WE WANT TO HAVE THAT MOMENT WITH FANS WHERE WE CAN ALL ENJOY IT TOGETHER"
> **CHERYL**

The band last gigged in 2013 with Ten: The Hits Tour after which they announced their split. The following years saw the girls strike out solo, with Cheryl scoring five No.1s, and Kimberley, Nadine and Nicola all releasing solo LPs. Sarah Harding went into acting, appearing on *Coronation Street* and winning *Celebrity Big Brother,* before passing away in September 2021.

The 12-date tour kicks off on 18 May 2024 in Dublin with further shows at Manchester, Cardiff, Glasgow and more, before climaxing on 29 June at Liverpool's M&S Bank Arena. Tickets are available from girlsaloud.com.

Despite it being 11 years since their last single, *Beautiful 'Cause You Love Me,* it's been confirmed that the reunited group won't be releasing any new music. Instead, their press statement said "the tour will be a celebration of Girls Aloud's rich back catalogue and all the groundbreaking success they have achieved as a band."

Rick Rubin helms Gossip's Powerful comeback

Indie group Gossip are to unveil their first album in 11 years. *Real Power* is set for release on 22 March 2024, via Sony Music Entertainment. The new album marks a reunion with producer Rick Rubin, who helmed the band's 2009 LP *Music For Men.*

At the coaxing of Rubin, the band started recording in 2019 after completing a tour for the 10-year anniversary of the latter album. Recorded at Rubin's home studio in Kauai, Hawaii, the process was temporarily halted by the pandemic and resumed when restrictions lifted.

"When we began, so much about Gossip was about running away – that was always in the music," explains frontwoman Beth Ditto.

"We survived. We came from nothing, and we got the fuck out of there. And to be here 20 years later and still making music together is just incredible."

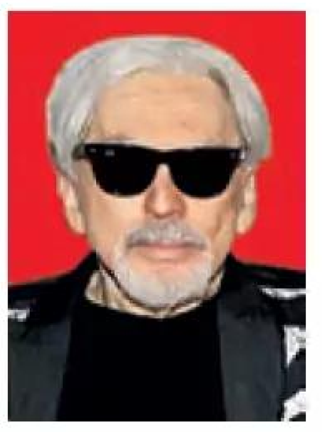
The album has been preceded by the release of the single *Crazy Again.* "The song is about actually being in love and feeling so safe," adds Ditto. The track's music video sees Gossip once again collaborating with director Ssion (Perfume Genius, King Princess).

Kylie's *Body Language* gets 20th anniversary vinyl reissue

Kylie Minogue's ninth studio album *Body Language* is being released on vinyl for the first time to mark its 20th anniversary.

The musically diverse long-player saw Kylie explore 80s influences including synth-pop, electroclash and hip-hop. The record made No.6 on the UK Albums Chart on its original release in 2004 and featured the hits *Slow, Red Blooded Woman* and *Chocolate.* A new blood red pressing will be available on 23 February.

BLONDIE'S CHRIS STEIN IS "DOUBTFUL" HE'LL PERFORM LIVE AGAIN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Blondie's Chris Stein has revealed that he may never play with the group again. Talking to *The Sunday Times*, the guitarist, who co-formed the band with his then-girlfriend Debbie Harry in 1974, admitted that he often feels "fatigued" and has come to terms with the fact he might never tour again.

Stein last performed with Blondie in 2019 and in 2022 issued a statement explaining his absence from the live lineup, saying, "I'm sad and frustrated to report that I'm not going out with the next bunch of Blondie touring. I've been dealing with a dumbass condition called Atrial Fibrillation or AFib, which is irregular heartbeats and combined with the meds I take for it I'm too fatigued to deal."

He was later diagnosed with prostate cancer. Now, talking to *The Sunday Times*, Stein says he's unsure whether he's up to performing anymore. "I miss it a little [playing live], but it's a lot of work, and I did it for 50 years. I kind of got it out of my system," he said. "It's doubtful I'm gonna do more shows at this point."

He went on to say that he believed the rock'n'roll lifestyle played a part in his current health woes. "All this stuff caught up with me in my old age," Stein said. "Don't do drugs, kids, is all I can say. All that shit I did over the years didn't help."

In other news, Stein has written a memoir, titled *Under A Rock*, that's set for release on 11 June next year via St. Martin's Press, with a foreword written by Debbie Harry.

LET'S ROCK ANNOUNCES LINEUP FOR FOUR FESTIVALS

Ali Campbell makes his Let's Rock festival debut in 2024 and Jason Donovan (inset) is back for more

Let's Rock has announced the lineups for four of its 2024 festivals – Leeds, Exeter, Shrewsbury and Southampton.

Headliners include UB40 Featuring Ali Campbell – who are making their Let's Rock debut – plus The Human League and Squeeze, while Martin Kemp is taking to the wheels of steel for a DJ set.

Ali Campbell said: "We're really looking forward to making our debut at Let's Rock next summer. We've heard great things about the energy of the crowds at these festivals, which is something we love to tap into. Sunshine, good vibes and reggae music... the perfect summer's evening."

In a lineup packed with *CP* favourites, also performing next summer are Bananarama, The Boomtown Rats, Peter Hook & The Light, Level 42, Jason Donovan and Sister Sledge as well as From The Jam, Go West, Nik Kershaw, Altered Images, Kim Appleby, Toyah and many more.

The Let's Rock festivals season kicks off on 22 June at Temple Newsam in Leeds and is followed a week later by the Exeter leg at Powderham Castle. On 6 July, Southampton Common plays host including headliners The Human League while Shrewsbury's Let's Rock takes place on 13 July with Squeeze topping the bill.

Next year will also see the first ever Let's Rock DJ Battles, with Pat Sharp taking on Andy Crane in Leeds, Toby Anstis in Exeter and Harriet Scott appearing in Southampton.

Let's Rock organisers and founders Nick Billinghurst and Matt Smith commented: "We're thrilled to announce the lineups for four of next summer's festivals. We have returning Let's Rock legends like Level 42 and Jason Donovan, plus iconic artists making their debut, including UB40 Featuring Ali Campbell and Martin Kemp."

● **Tickets for the Let's Rock festivals are priced from £35 and available from letsrock80s.com**

80s incarnation of The Damned reunites for UK tour

The Damned's 80s line-up is to perform together for the first time in more than three decades as original drummer Rat Scabies joins Dave Vanian, Captain Sensible and Paul Gray on a nationwide tour next December.

Drummer Scabies – real name Christopher Millar – last played with the band in 2022, but has now rejoined permanently. On the last tour, he played with Vanian, Captain Sensible and original member Brian James, but will now be reunited with the 80s lineup featuring Paul Gray, who joined in 1980, on bass.

The group will be heading out on the 12-date UK jaunt, beginning 4 December in Newcastle and taking in such cities as Glasgow, Manchester, Leeds, Bristol and Cambridge, before climaxing at London's Roundhouse on 18 December.

© Michael Putland Archive

According to the band, fans can expect to hear songs from the LPs *Machine Gun Etiquette* (1979), the following year's *The Black Album* and *Strawberries* from 1982, as well as Damned favourites such as *New Rose* and *Neat Neat Neat*.

The Damned formed in 1976 and released their debut LP, *Damned Damned Damned*, the following year. They put out 12th studio album, *Darkadelic*, this April, with William Granville-Taylor on drums. Speaking about returning as a full-time member, Scabies quipped: "Be careful what you wish for..."

1 HIT WONDER

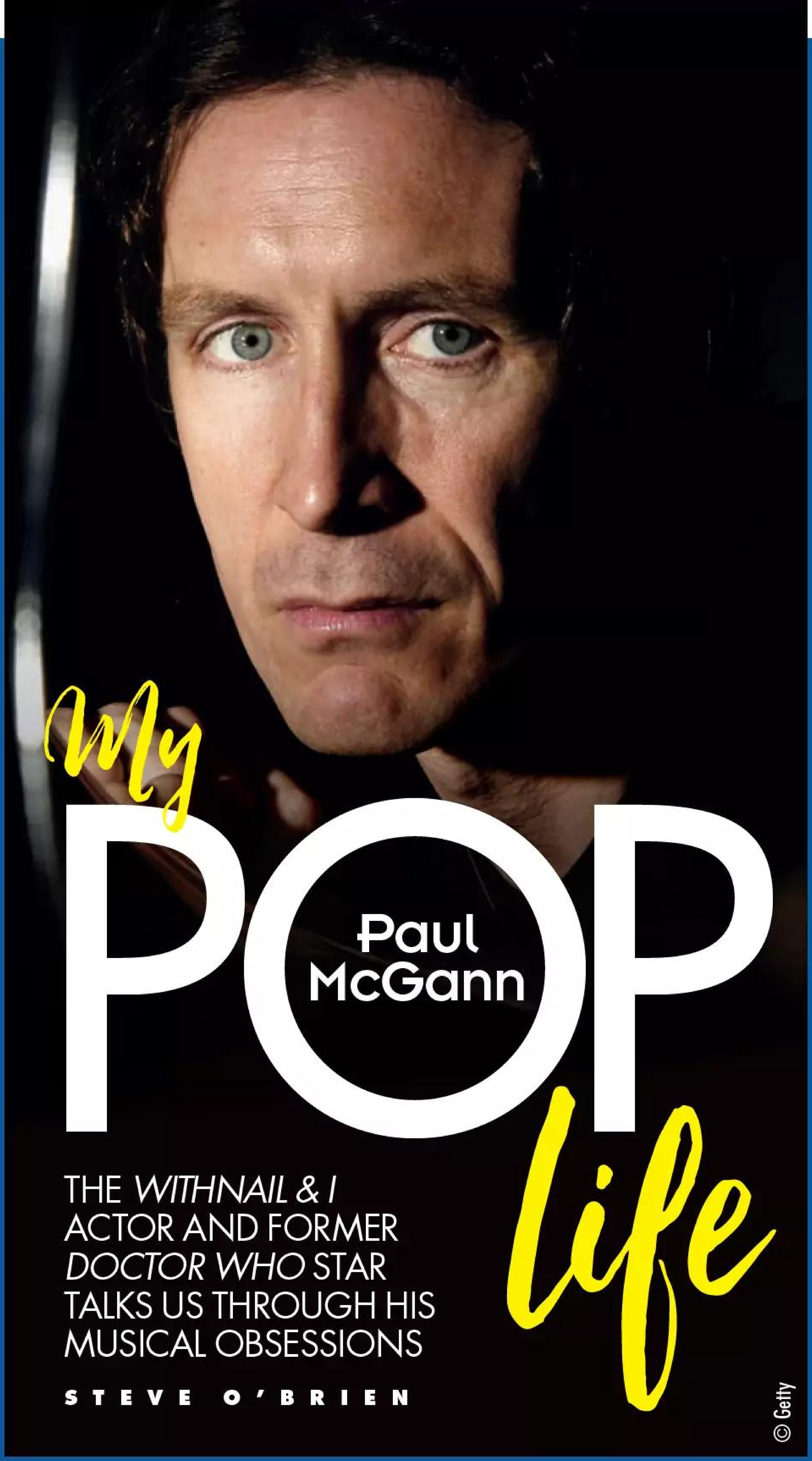
KEEPING THE DREAM ALIVE
FREIHEIT

It's no surprise, from the fairydust intro to the judicious December release and sleeve showing two children hanging stockings over a fireplace, that *Keeping The Dream Alive* has been cast as a Christmas record. Freiheit, the German synth-rock band responsible, have always denied a seasonal connection but remain grateful to their marketing people, as the inference has kept the track on festive playlists and Christmas compilations ever since.

The iciness associated with German pop was thawed by a rich backing from the London Symphony Orchestra, and it has a fervid, all-in vocal from four of the five band members. Though the lyrics tell a slightly clichéd tale of looking up at the stars that smacks slightly of an attempt to rewrite *In My Life*, it still resonates a spirit and togetherness without being sickly.

Translated from German for English-speaking nations, it eventually reached No.15 for Christmas 1988; then peaked at No.14 in the new year. No album or further singles charted, and it flopped in the States. Freiheit, full name Münchener Freiheit ("Munich Freedom") continued to have success in mainland Europe and finished 18th for Germany at the Eurovision Song Contest in 1993 (Sonia came second for the UK). Although main singer Stefan Zauner left in 2012, the rest of the band still tour regularly. Their most recent album appeared in 2016.

MATTHEW RUDD IS THE HOST OF FORGOTTEN 80s ON ABSOLUTE 80s



My POP *life*

Paul McGann

THE *WITHNAIL & I* ACTOR AND FORMER *DOCTOR WHO* STAR TALKS US THROUGH HIS MUSICAL OBSESSIONS

STEVE O'BRIEN

© Getty

Did you have any music posters on your wall growing up?
Of course. Mostly the kind you'd get free with magazines, though sometimes it might be the artwork that came with albums. It was a golden era, so there'd be pictures of David Bowie, Mott The Hoople, T. Rex, Alice Cooper…

What's the first pop song you remember loving?
Puff The Magic Dragon by Peter, Paul And Mary. Don't judge me.

Do you have a favourite album?
It's probably an age thing, but these days I seem to have a different one each week which I'll play, even via an app, in order and all the way through. Right now it's *Hejira* by Joni Mitchell.

What about your favourite 80s album?
My wife and I first played Kate Bush's *Hounds Of Love* over and over on cassette while in the hills of Nepal in 1985. It amazed us then and still does now. And I'll bet there's a fair number of players and producers in their 30s and 40s who as children would listen to that second side on headphones in bed.

Are there any bands or artists that you're a completist about?
Not really, as it would mean my having to love live, or worse, bootlegged live recordings. With a few exceptions, I just can't.

Have you ever met any of your musical heroes?
Quite a few, and I'm glad to say none has ever disappointed. If I could turn back the clock and change one occasion it would be the night I met George Harrison at a party and he asked me to get up

and sing with him and his mates and I bottled out. What a fool.

What's your favourite gig that you've been to?
Sometime in 1966, I was taken as a child by my mum to a packed Empire Theatre in Liverpool to see a revue headlined by Ben E. King which included The Cryin' Shames, a group my then teenage cousin Ritchie Routledge played guitar with. It was the first of countless gigs that I'd see in my life but perhaps the most unforgettable. We've been remembering it again while mourning Ritchie's death recently, aged 73.

If there was anyone, alive or dead, you could see play live, who would it be?
Prince. I still can't believe I never did despite all the opportunities I had. I suppose I always thought there'd be another one, when suddenly there wasn't. Also Billie Holiday. That'd be me with my breath having stopped, like the audience in that Frank O'Hara poem about her.

Did you ever buy the music press when you were younger? If so, what was your favourite read?
I can't remember actually buying it but I had an older brother who did, so it would appear in the house and I'd read it. *NME*, *Sounds* and the like. At the time it seemed important, like the music itself. Now even the very idea seems quaint.

As regards listening to music, are you a vinyl hound or a Spotify-head?
It's the best of both worlds. Our basement at home is full of vinyl, most of which our son uses to do shows, along with some turntables he rehearses on. Elsewhere in the house it's bluetooth speakers. I'll sometimes lie for more than an hour in the bath (I know) listening to music. It used to be Spotify until I discovered Tidal. ■

> "I MET GEORGE HARRISON AT A PARTY AND HE ASKED ME TO GET UP AND SING WITH HIM AND HIS MATES AND I BOTTLED OUT. WHAT A FOOL."

Not only did Paul miss out on the chance to sing with a Beatle, he never got to witness a Prince live show – "I always thought there'd be another [chance], when suddenly there wasn't."

© Getty

Q+A D:REAM

THE 90s DANCE DUO WHOSE CLUB ANTHEM BECAME A POP HIT THAT SUMMED UP AN ENTIRE DECADE

BETH SIMPSON

© Sean McDonagh

Peter Cunnah was the cute tartan-suited frontman, Al Mackenzie the DJ; club buddies who became pop stars and yes they wrote *that* epoch-defining hit. But there is a lot more than just *Things Can Only Get Better* in D:Ream's story – we're talking a brilliant platinum-selling debut LP, drug epiphanies, cocaine addiction, a falling out over whether or not to support Take That and eventually reconciliation...

How did the pair of you first meet?
AL: I used to run a night at the Brain Club in Soho. We met via my ex-wife. Pete used to go down there and one night she said to him, 'Look, Al's doing music, you're struggling with something, why don't you have a chat with him?' I hadn't been in a studio before where it was in a bedroom. Was there a bed in there?
PETER: No, I kind of sacrificed the bed so that I could sleep on the floor and have all my synths around the wall.

Peter, back then the story was that you'd had this epiphany in a club...
I did. I was being led astray, quite willingly by various people. I was with this girl at the time. One night she said, 'My friend is running this club in the Elephant'. I heard all this music and she gave me half a pill and I just went off my head. I had this moment where I felt so connected to the universe and the music – and 'cause I'm a synesthesiac I could see the colour of the sounds. I was blown away by the whole thing. That was my road to Damascas moment.

To what extent were early D:Ream tracks inspired by that experience? *U R The Best Thing* sounds like a hymn to ecstasy.
PETER: Quite possibly it was. It could be about a drug. It could be about a person. It doesn't matter. It just has that feeling, that euphoria you get when you've been searching for something and then all of a sudden you find it. *Things Can Only Get Better* is: 'I've found the scene, I've found the people, I've found Alan'. That line: "You sort the wood from the trees/ You bring in the light", that's specifically about Alan bringing his vibe to the table. It's about that epiphany moment.

Al, is it true you left because you didn't want to tour with Take That?
I just got sick of the whole machine. I liked making the music but we weren't making any. Once you get into the whole promo round you're not doing anything and for me that wasn't any fun.

***Things Can Only Get Better* was reissued and reached No.1 in 1994. Why do you think the country was ripe for that message at that time?**
AL: This country is always in some impending crisis. So that song works at any time.

How did pop fame effect you, Peter?
In one way it's a complete joy but the other side is quite traumatic – you're faced with new and very challenging things pretty much constantly. I ended up with a proper cocaine habit. I was doing coke just to keep going. By '96 I was out of the limelight, it was just me and my hangers-on and then I was in recovery. I spent four-and-a-half years in AA and NA.

The second album *World* sold far less than the first one. What went wrong?
PETER: The label wanted another album and I'd gone through my best songs. I was writing away but the pressure was on, as it always is, to feed the machine. I thought it wasn't too shabby at the time, but it wasn't my best work.

What led you to donate *Things...* to the Labour campaign in 1997?
PETER: It was Jazz Summers. I was managed by him and he felt that it would be a good idea to show some support for the Labour Party – New Labour, let's not forget. When they took us to war in Iraq I dropped them like a hot potato. I still get people claiming that I've got blood on my hands...
AL: I've had people say I'm responsible for the Iraq War! But you know what? I hate the Tories; always have. So I think getting them out was a great thing. You don't know what's going to happen afterwards. It's not the song's fault.

How do you feel about it becoming so emblematic of the 90s? Every time there's something on TV about the decade there's that clip of Blair glad-handing people at Downing Street to the strains of the song.
AL: Well, it's a calling card. It means we can still work and for a song to almost be a symbol of the 90s means you've done something right.

And you're still making music...
PETER: We reformed in 2008 and we've recorded two albums – *In Memory Of* and *Open Hearts Open Minds*. We're currently working on our fifth studio album.

● **D:Ream's Best Of album *D:Ream – The Best Thing* is out now via NewState and reviewed on page 90**

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80s Classical
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MIDGE URE
JOHNNY HATES JAZZ
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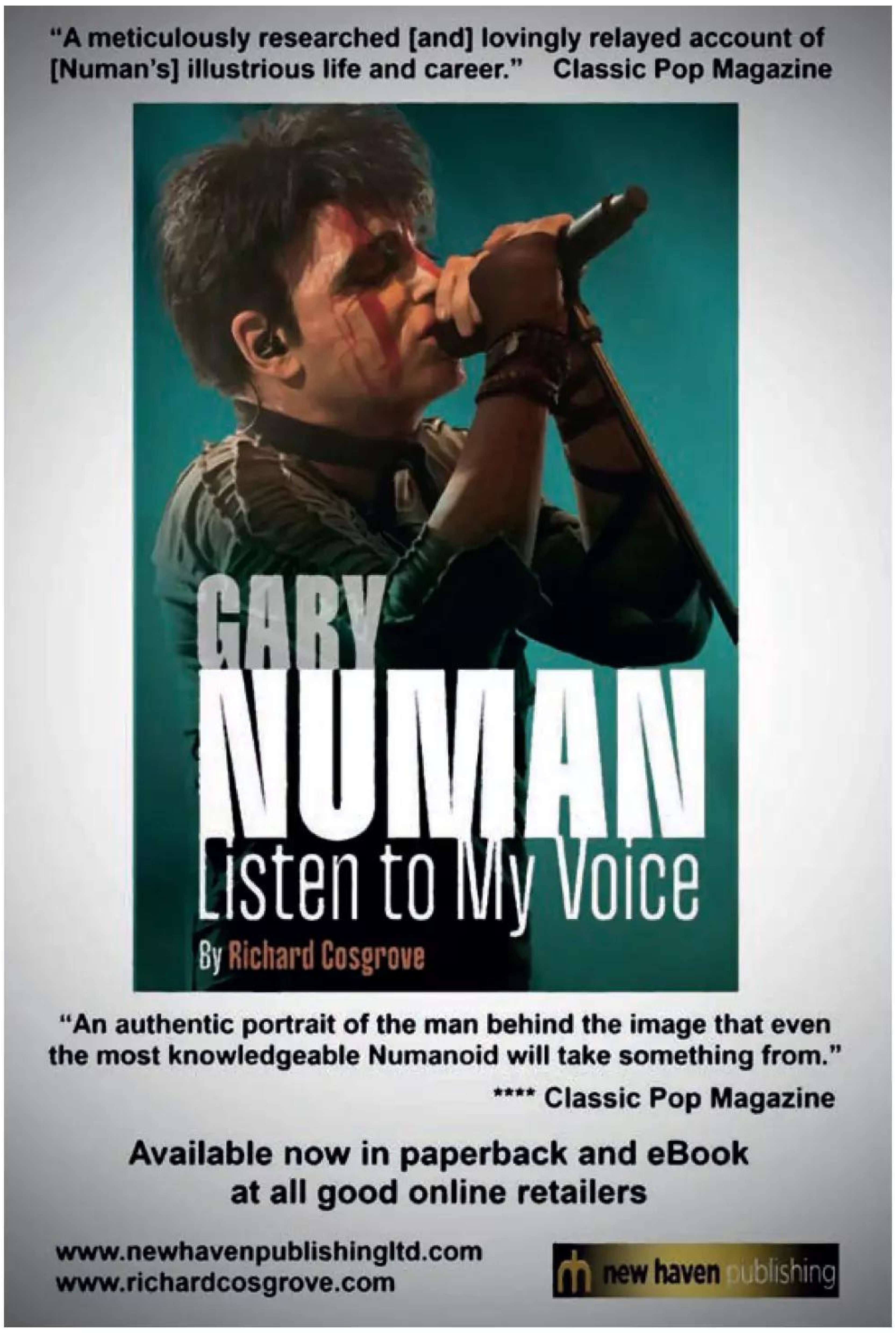
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Midge Ure and Deniece Pearson (inset) both play 80s Classical in Leeds next year

© Andy Futers

BANANARAMA, MIDGE URE + MORE HEAD TO LEEDS FOR 80s CLASSICAL

Leeds is set to welcome some of pop's hottest names when 80s Classical lands at the city's Millennium Square next July. Bananarama, Midge Ure, Johnny Hates Jazz and Five Star's Deniece Pearson will all be performing their biggest hits, backed by the 50-piece Orchestra Of Opera North.

Reflecting on their first shows with an orchestra, a clearly thrilled Bananarama's Sara Dallin said: "We're so excited to be involved in such a unique and exciting concert which is a fitting way to continue our 40th anniversary celebrations."

Bandmate Keren Woodward added: "Leeds is such a vibrant city to visit and perform in, we can't wait to take to the stage in the iconic Millennium Square with such a talented array of musicians on what is going to be a truly magical occasion for everyone."

Established in 2019, 80s Classical brings pop luminaries together with the symphonic might of Opera North's musicians. 2024's event, on Saturday 20 July, has been put together by Cliff Masterson and Kylie Minogue's musical director Steve Anderson.

"We're absolutely delighted to be able to welcome Bananarama and Midge Ure into the 80s Classical family and can't wait for everyone to see them perform for the first time alongside the magnificent Orchestra Of Opera North," said Steve, with Cliff adding: "Everyone knows the iconic songs of such a generation-defining era and we are so thrilled and grateful to be trusted with the responsibility of reimagining such cherished [material]. With two brand-new artists performing this year, this is set to be yet another epic night of drama and excitement in Leeds."

- **Tickets for 80s Classical are on sale now from millsqleeds.com and operanorth.co.uk. Standing tickets are priced at £36.85, with a limited amount of reserved seating available at £45.65.**

SHANE MACGOWAN DIES AGED 65

As *Classic Pop* went to press, news broke of the sad death of Shane MacGowan, aged 65.

The Pogues frontman passed away following a recent hospital stay where he had been diagnosed with encephalitis. A statement from MacGowan's spokesperson said the singer had died peacefully in the early hours of the morning on 30 November with his family by his side.

MacGowan fronted The Pogues from 1982 through to their eventual split in 2014. Their most famous song was *Fairytale Of New York*, a festive classic also featuring Kirsty MacColl. A documentary about the Pogues frontman's life, *Crock Of Gold: A Few Rounds With Shane MacGowan*, was released in 2020.

Irish President Michael D. Higgins paid tribute to MacGowan calling him one of music's greatest lyricists: "So many of his songs would be perfectly crafted poems, if that would not have deprived us of the opportunity to hear him sing them."

© Getty

LOST & FOUND

VERMIN IN ERMINE
MARC ALMOND

For such a distinctive and beloved representative of the early 80s, it's notable that Marc Almond struggled for some time to establish his solo credentials, as demonstrated by an interesting but underachieving first album.

Backed superbly by his band The Willing Sinners, Almond rages and splutters on the dark, seedy tracks that revisit Soft Cell's more troubled themes, and yet the vivacity of the cabaret crooner that would encapsulate later years is just as dominant, not least on storybook launch single *The Boy Who Came Back*, a beautiful pop melody that deserved better than its No.52 peak in the UK.

The other singles – *You Have* (No.57) and *Tenderness Is A Weakness* (No.88) – are similarly designed as crowd-pleasers, but Almond's demons rise to the surface on the ranting opener *Shining Sinners*, jaunty confessional *Hell Was A City* and the masochistic *Crime Sublime*.

Then there's *Ugly Head*, a self-loathing and menacing epic; and *Gutter Hearts*, which manages to combine lyrics of destitute desperation with a production straight out of Motown.

Most of the tracks are too long – and that's before three extra songs were added to the CD release – but it justifies the required staying power.

It's a shame 1984's British record-buying public didn't think so, with the album managing just a fortnight on the chart, reaching No.36.

It took a collaboration with Bronski Beat the following year for Almond's solo career to ignite.

MATTHEW RUDD

GO WEST

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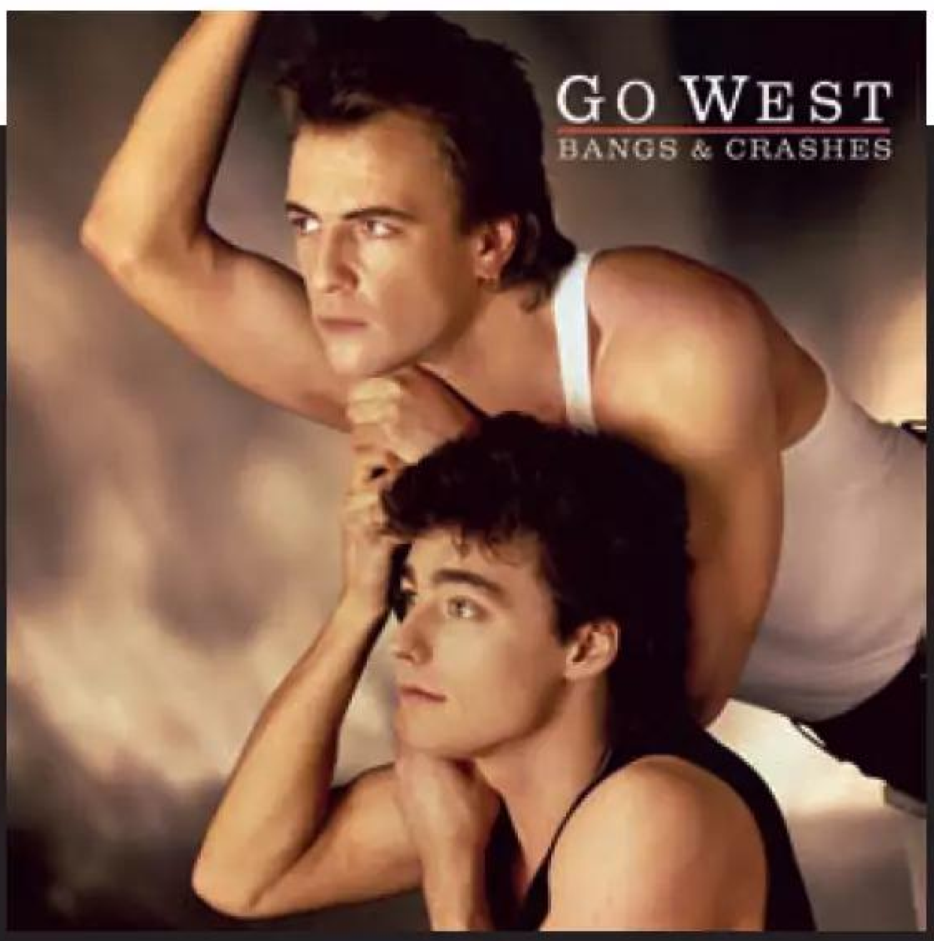

MORE FROM
GO WEST

Chrysalis
CATALOGUE

Ian Peel's A to Z of POP

G IS FOR...
GREATEST HITS SINGLES

HOW IS IT THAT SO MANY CLASSIC GREATEST HITS COMPILATIONS WERE RELEASED WITH TRACKS THAT WE'D NEVER ACTUALLY HEARD BEFORE?

I have a strange affection for Greatest Hits singles. Not singles that were the biggest hits of their respective artists or groups. But singles that were recorded especially to appear on a retrospective compilation even though, very often, no one had ever heard them before. Let alone sent them to the top of the charts.

You can imagine the conversation in stuffy record label offices: "What this band needs is a Greatest Hits! It will be the perfect way to restart their career," says one. "Yes, but it needs a new track as well as all the old classics," adds another. "But why, and what if it doesn't become one of their greatest hits?" counters one. "It doesn't matter – every album needs a single, and compilations are no different. Besides, it will show that even though we're cashing in on past glories, the group is still current and has a future..."

I'm paraphrasing but I've been in more meetings than I care to remember where that has been the almost exact transcript. And the funny thing is, these extra, special additions to a Greatest Hits almost inevitably never become a hit. They help trail the album a little, but record labels have yet to learn that they don't really work as intended and all they're really doing is piling up a random set of one-off tracks that become curios for collectors and classic pop obsessives.

Sometimes they annoy the artist beyond belief. Other times they're a pinpoint to where the artist was on their creative journey. But enough preamble, what are the most notable Greatest Hits singles?

In 1990, Mercury Records commissioned the producer Paul Staveley O'Duffy to remix ABC's *The Look Of Love*. On the plus side, he managed to weave in the melody from Kraftwerk's *Computer Love*. On the downside, neither Mark White nor Martin Fry were consulted, and the pair of them hated it. It did at least promote – as all publicity is good publicity – the first of many, many ABC compilations, that year's *Absolutely*.

The process must have seemed more straightforward to Parlophone when they put together *Natural History*, a Talk Talk Greatest Hits the same year. The bonus track here was *My Foolish Friend*, which had been released as a single in 1983 but never appeared on an album. Just one problem, Mark Hollis was completely against the idea of a hits compilation in general. As he told *Melody Maker*: "I don't like compilation albums and I didn't like that one."

THESE EXTRA SPECIAL ADDITIONS ALMOST NEVER BECOME A HIT – THEY HELP TRAIL THE ALBUM A LITTLE, BUT ALL THEY'RE REALLY DOING IS PILING UP A RANDOM SET OF CURIOS FOR COLLECTORS AND CLASSIC POP OBSESSIVES

When Level 42 marked their first decade as recordings artists with the *Level Best* compilation, the additional single was *Take Care Of Yourself*. It was the perfect postscript to reboot album *Staring At The Sun* with Gary Husband fresh on the drum stool and the equally influential Kate Bush collaborator Alan Murphy on guitar.

But it turned out to be Murphy's swansong as he sadly passed away just days after it was released. And by the time the band regrouped and delivered *Guaranteed* in 1991, it was a long way from the perfect pop they had pointed to with *Take Care Of Yourself*.

OMD, too, marked the end of an era with *Dreaming* for 1988's *The Best Of OMD*, but it's still well worth a listen. And the same can very much be said for Ultravox's *Love's Great Adventure*, Madonna's *Justify My Love* and The Art of Noise's *Kiss* with Tom Jones, all of which must rank as some of the greatest Greatest Hits singles ever.

TOMORROW'S HERE TODAY

LIGHTNING SEEDS

35 YEARS GREATEST HITS TOUR

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FRI	15	***CARDIFF*** TRAMSHED
THU	21	***BRISTOL*** O_2 ACADEMY
FRI	22	***OXFORD*** O_2 ACADEMY
SAT	23	***BEXHILL*** DE LA WARR PAVILION
THU	28	***NEWCASTLE*** BOILER SHOP
FRI	29	***GLASGOW*** GARAGE
SAT	30	***DUBLIN*** ACADEMY

DECEMBER 2024

SUN	01	***BELFAST*** LIMELIGHT
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'TOMORROW'S HERE TODAY' GREATEST HITS ALBUM OUT 4TH OCTOBER 2024

This month in POP

JANUARY 1988

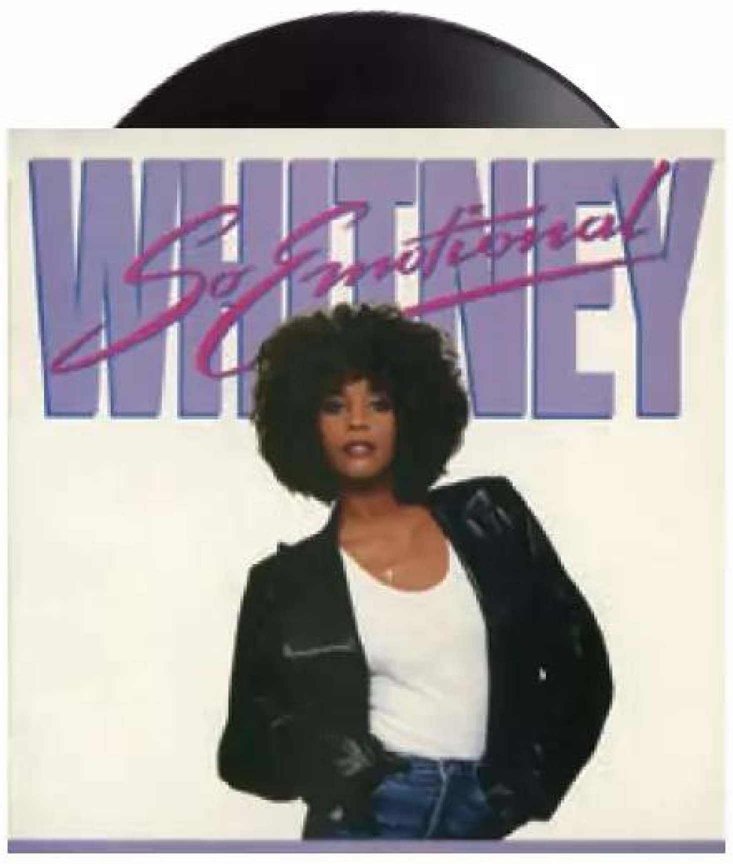
TINA TURNER WOWS THE CROWDS IN RIO WHILE WHITNEY AND JACKO TOP THE U.S. SINGLES CHART

STEVE O'BRIEN

Images © Getty

03 *Roy Orbison and Friends: A Black And White Night* premieres on American cable station Cinemax. His special guests include Bruce Springsteen, Elvis Costello, Tom Waits, Jackson Browne and k.d. lang.

09 Whitney Houston scores her sixth consecutive US No.1 with *So Emotional*. In the UK, the song peaks at No.5.



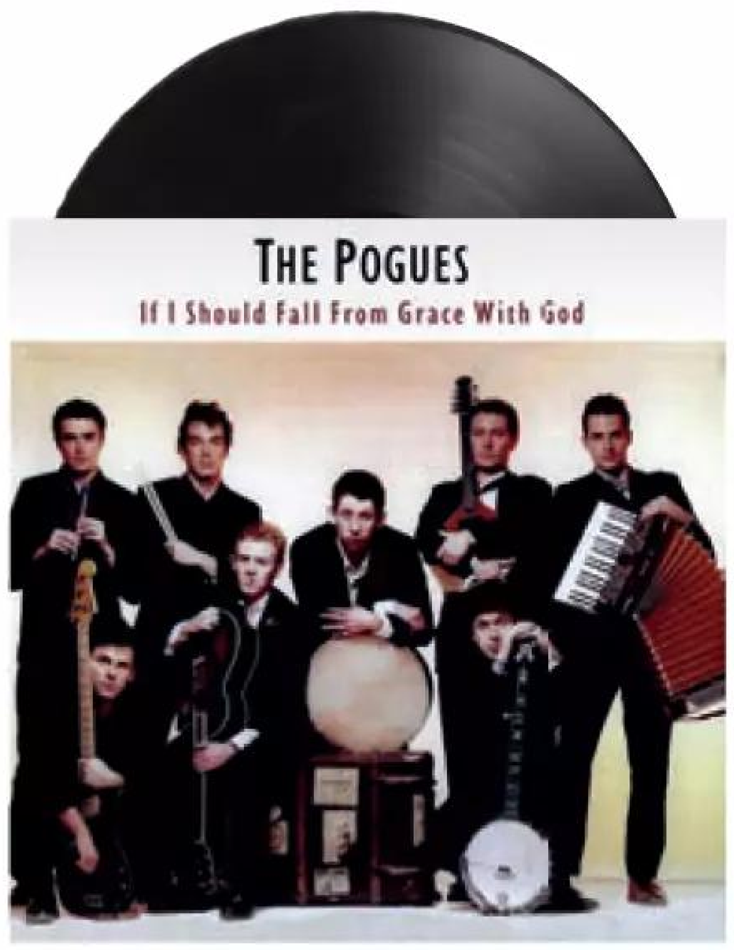
10 Former Go-Go's singer Belinda Carlisle makes No.1 in the UK with *Heaven Is A Place On Earth*. The song's video is directed by *Annie Hall* Oscar-winner Diane Keaton and features an appearance by Carlisle's husband Morgan Mason.

16 Tina Turner performs to over 180,000 people in Rio De Janeiro, earning her a place in *The Guinness Book Of Records.*

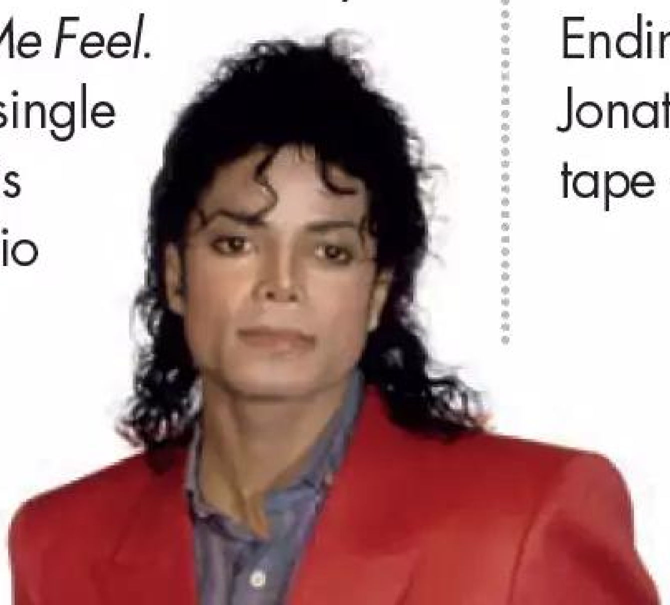
20 The Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame ceremony inducts The Beatles, The Beach Boys, The Drifters, Bob Dylan and The Supremes.

16 Future popstar FKA Twigs is born Tahliah Barnett in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire.

18 The Pogues release their third studio album, *If I Should Fall From Grace With God.*



23 Michael Jackson hits No.1 in the US with *The Way You Make Me Feel.* It's the third single spun from his seventh studio album *Bad.*



23 Nirvana record a 10-song demo with producer Jack Endino. Sub Pop label boss Jonathan Poneman hears the tape and signs the Seattle trio.

25 The 15th American Music Awards are screened on ABC in the US. Winners include Paul Simon for Favourite Pop/Rock Album (*Graceland*) and Whitney Houston for Favourite Pop/Rock Female Artist.

16

George Michael scored a No.1 on the US Albums Chart on 16 January 1988 with his debut solo LP *Faith*. The record would stay inside the US Top 10 for 51 non-consecutive weeks, including 12 weeks at the summit. It reached No.1 in the UK as well, but bizarrely just for one week. Still, it remains one of the best-selling albums of all time, having shifted more than 25 million copies worldwide, and was certified Diamond by the Recording Industry Association Of America in 1996. It was also an awards hoover, scooping Album of the Year at the 31st Grammys and Favourite Soul/R&B Album at the 1989 American Music Awards. And this wasn't a case where the public and critics were of opposing opinions with even the usually sniffy *Rolling Stone* magazine praising Michael as "one of pop music's leading artisans, a painstaking craftsman who combines a graceful knack for vocal hooks with an uncanny ability to ransack the past for musical ideas and still sound fresh," and dubbing the singer the "Elton John of the 1980s."

Reflecting on the album in an interview with Mark Goodier in 2010, Michael said: "I absolutely wanted to be in the same stratosphere as [Michael Jackson and Prince], definitely. I'd gone from, a couple of years before, being perfectly happy with being on *Top Of The Pops*, to thinking, 'I can do what Michael Jackson can do.' I mean, he'd just done *Thriller* for fuck's sake! I wouldn't have the guts now. I wanted to be in that vein but, mostly, I wanted to make music as good as theirs."

TOP 5 UK ALBUMS CHART

17 JANUARY 1988

1 **TURN BACK THE CLOCK**
JOHNNY HATES JAZZ

2 **POPPED IN SOULED OUT**
WET WET WET

3 **INTRODUCING THE HARDLINE ACCORDING TO...**
TERENCE TRENT D'ARBY

4 **THE CHRISTIANS**
THE CHRISTIANS

5 **BAD**
MICHAEL JACKSON

IT'S BEEN 40 YEARS SINCE BANANARAMA'S DEBUT ALBUM, BUT KEREN WOODWARD AND SARA DALLIN'S FRIENDSHIP SINCE THEY WERE TEENAGERS IN BRISTOL GOES BACK EVEN FURTHER. AS NEW BEST OF COMPILATION *GLORIOUS* CELEBRATES DECADES OF IMPERIOUS POP, THE DUO TELL US HOW THEY HAVE OVERCOME EVERYTHING THE INDUSTRY COULD THROW AT THEM – AND WHY IT'S NEVER A GOOD IDEA TO TRY TO DRESS LIKE BANANARAMA AT AN 80s PARTY…

JOHN EARLS

"Our *music* was about finding something *other* than what was *expected* of us"

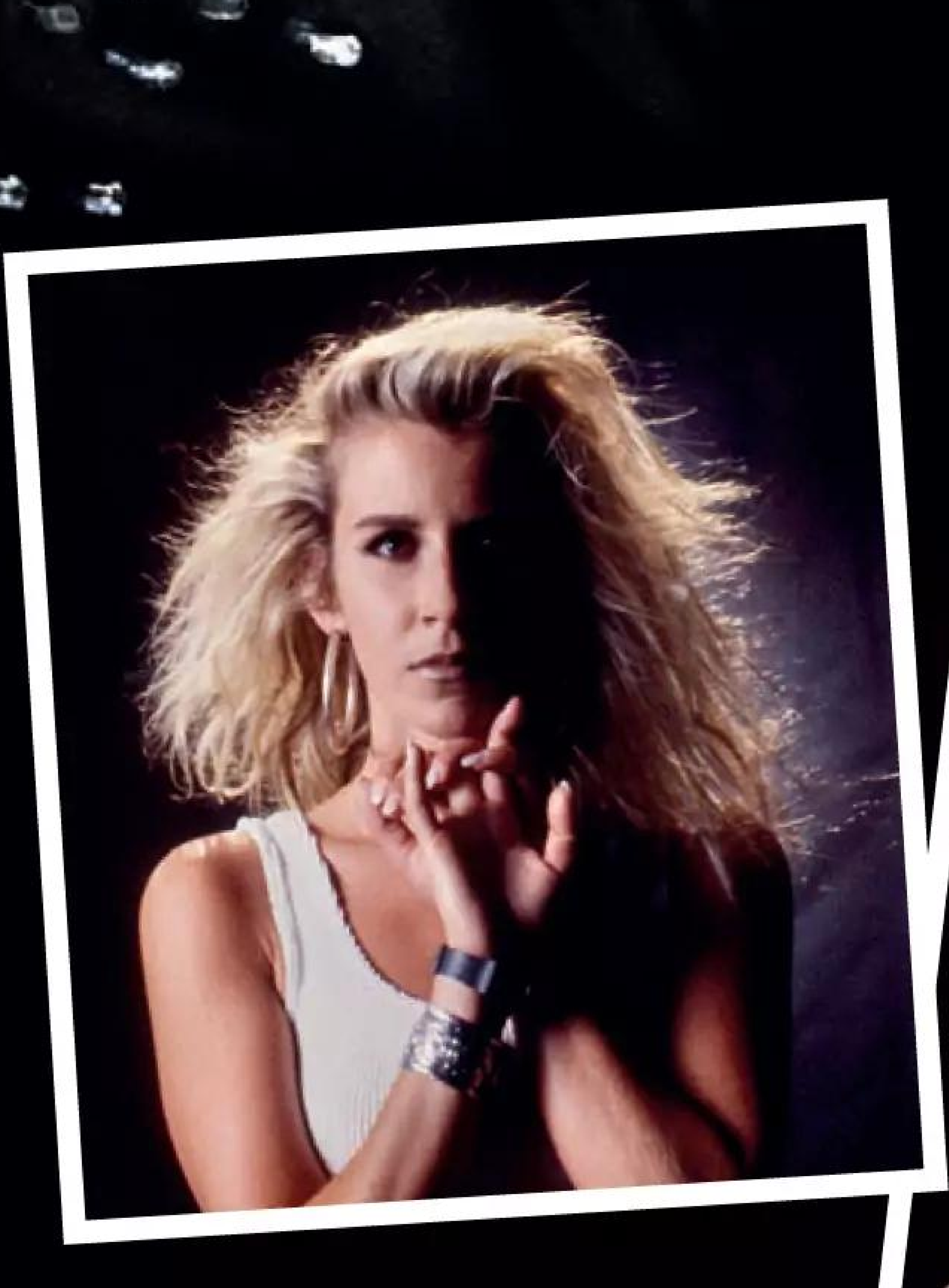
Pop Life: It's been 40 glorious years since Bananarama's debut album *Deep Sea Skiving* made the UK Top 10

© Mark Mattock

"Oh, come on, have a lager!" As Bananarama order some post-lunch coffees at a busy deli in Kings Cross, Keren Woodward invites *Classic Pop* to fully join in their mischief.

We're halfway through an interview where Keren and Sara Dallin have been going deep on how they've shone for 40 years in a music industry that's thrown endless obstacles in their path as pioneering women in pop. It's only in recent years that Keren and Sara have realised just how influential Bananarama were in surviving and thriving, while offering up classics in a hugely diverse yet always poptivist array of styles.

Having triumphed since launching their own record label In Synk for 2019's *In Stereo* album, plus a new Best Of collection showcasing what Bananarama have stood for these past 40 years, the duo are as close to relaxing as pop warriors ever get. And yet... it's a giddy enough experience to spend 90 minutes in Bananarama's company, without the need for any daytime refreshment. Just a water, please.



© Getty

Bananarama hold the Guinness world record for the most charting singles for an all-female band

"We wanted this to be a unique collection, a celebration of all the twists and turns in our career," says Sara of their new 40-track compilation

© Mark Mattock

"We were singing about our experiences. Anyone could be a pop star at that time. It didn't matter where you were from or who you were. SARA DALLIN

Realising that we mean business, Sara and Keren return to analysing exactly what it is that Bananarama have represented since they released debut LP *Deep Sea Skiving* in 1983 with Siobhan Fahey. "Determination. Freedom," considers Dallin of the essence of Bananarama. "We've always been ourselves, always natural. But then, we're incapable of not being ourselves. We had to be natural." Woodward adds: "Bananarama started out just as something that we loved: music. We learned how to write songs, and I loved that. Since then, we've toured the world and experienced different cultures. That's fed into what we do, we've been lucky to experience that."

Sara is right that Bananarama are always absolutely Bananarama. Whether choosing to go ultra-pop with Stock, Aitken Waterman, experimenting with The Verve producer Youth or rediscovering their love of pop with Swedish machine-tooled hitmakers Murlyn, Bananarama nearly always know what they should do next. But it's only ever been on their terms. Don't try to get Sara or Keren to play the game, there's no point.

"We didn't have the capacity to fit in," insists Dallin. "It's not natural for us to suddenly switch it on." Woodward admits: "We struggled to be sincere. In the early days, every time we'd do an ident, we'd be (*adopts wooden monotone*): 'Er, hello...'" Keren throws a look to her bandmate who, as happens a lot over lunch with Bananarama, is trying hard to keep her composure. "She's the worst. Sara would sound really wooden, then go to the other extreme: 'Hi!!! SARA HERE!!!' We've learned to ignore what we're supposed to say, and just say something in the way we'd get the message across."

© Getty

Three of a kind: Bananarama in 1984 – Keren, Siobhan Fahey and Sara

AU NATUREL

A common theme in past Bananarama interviews is their joint mortification at how awkward they looked in their early *Top Of The Pops* appearances. They didn't know which camera to perform to.

In their view, chaos ensued. But didn't that make them look more natural to viewers? "You're right, absolutely," nods Woodward. "We didn't know what we were doing, and also we weren't styled. We didn't have any expensive clothes, so you really could be like us. It was maybe the last time when you could totally find your own way. Now, of course, there are literally places like the Brit School where you can learn to be a pop star. It's more slick and glossy."

Whether that's a good thing for a duo who've remained relatable for 40 years, without needing to try, is debatable. Having decamped from their native

REMEMBERING TERRY HALL

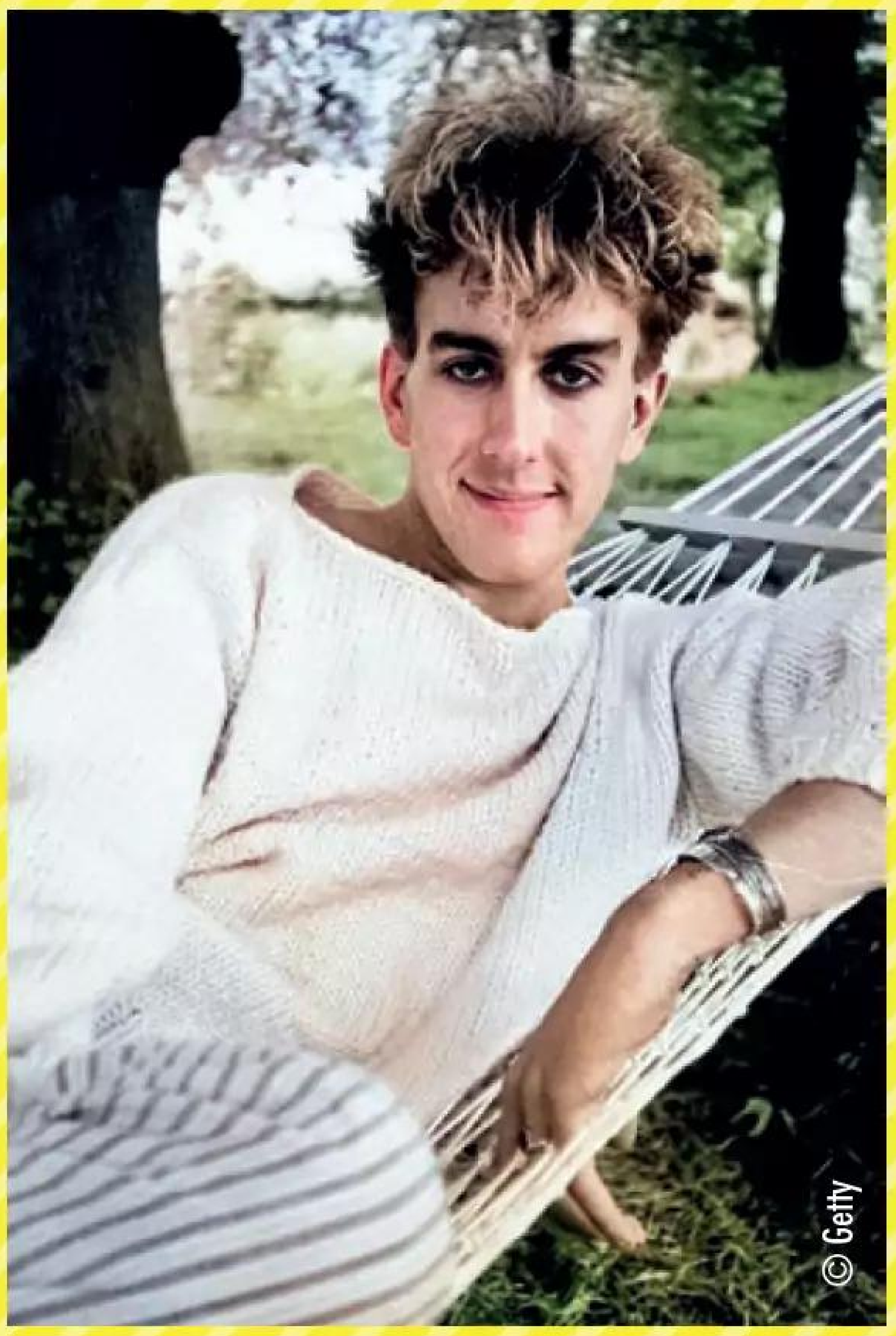
Bananarama were devastated to learn of the death of their early mentor Terry Hall, after working with Fun Boy Three on their first two hits, *T'Aint What You Do (It's The Way That You Do It)* and *Really Saying Something*, in 1982.

After Bananarama had made inroads with debut single *Aie A Mwana* the year before, Hall famously spotted the trio in *The Face* and invited them to work with him alongside Lynval Golding and Neville Staple in the aftermath of The Specials' split.

"Terry was incredible," says Sara Dallin of Hall, who died from cancer in 2022. "He was very encouraging – in a quiet way, obviously. Terry asked us: 'Can you come and play on our album?' We told him we were singers, not musicians, but he was so open to us joining in. It wasn't: 'Now sing this line,' it was much more freedom with Terry. He gave us some drums and maracas, and off we went."

Keren Woodward adds: "Terry inspired us more than he could have known. I thought: 'He's made it when he's so shy, so why can't we?' Terry proved that you don't have to be 'Ta-dah!' or showbiz to succeed."

Sara takes up the theme, noting: "Terry showed you don't have to be fake. He was never anything but Terry Hall, ever. We'd bumped into him for the first time in years the year before he died. Terry gave Bananarama a massive step up the ladder and we'll be forever grateful for that."



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Bristol to London's welcoming squat culture at the end of the 1970s, where they met Siobhan Fahey, Bananarama believe they were fortunate to form when they did.

"You could still be working-class and thrive in London, and that's not the case now," ponders Dallin. "We had tenacity, but so did a lot of other artists from our era, because none of them came from privileged backgrounds. Being in London at that time, it really was a movement."

Keren says half of their friends, including Siobhan, were Londoners, while half were from outside of the capital. "So much about Bananarama was from our working-class backgrounds," she reasons. "We were singing about our experiences. Anyone could be a pop star at that time. Everyone else seemed like us, too: Boy George, Soft Cell, whoever, it didn't matter where you were from or who you were." Sara concludes: "Our music was about finding something other than what was expected of us."

That attitude of "Here we are, have it", there from the start of Bananarama's music, was brought home when Dallin revisited her early lyric books as the duo assembled *Glorious*, their new 40-track compilation. The pair emphasise that they help each other out in all aspects of songwriting, but to generalise it's usually Sara writing lyrics, with Keren as the studio and musical arranger. "Those old lyrics are a huge part of my life," beams Dallin. "Going back over them, I can absolutely see how I'm feeling. I can see when I'm going clubbing, what boyfriend I have, when I'm feeling sexy. It's a big part of my story."

Despite their early songwriting prowess, it was sadly inevitable that their role in creating those first gems like *Cruel Summer* and *Shy Boy* were dismissed by critics and the industry in general. "It wasn't until Bananarama started that I realised men get more credit," frowns Woodward. "Growing up, I never saw any differential between what men and women could do. I thought we could all do everything. Then I'd see how men in bands were treated and I'd think: 'No, hang on, we're doing that, too.' We tried railing against it, knowing it was unfair." Sara: "The trouble is, once you start railing against things, it can make you bitter and angry." Keren: "But it was unfair." Sara: "It was, and you have to go through those battles. But then you come out the other side, laughing at those people who dismissed you, because they haven't destroyed you. The cliché is, it makes you stronger. And it actually does."

Although Bananarama were patronised by many at the start, thankfully at least their producers were encouraging. Steve Jolley and Tony Swain, the duo who also produced Spandau Ballet and Imagination, were sensible enough to realise Bananarama should sing like Bananarama, as Dallin explains: "They didn't want our songs to be thirtysomething men dictating what young women would say. The songs were very much our lyrics and ideas." Woodward continues: "It wasn't just lyrics. They involved us in arrangements, so we learned a lot from them about how songs were put together. Once we had hits, we became more confident about what we were doing."

New recruit Jacquie O'Sullivan (right) joined Bananarama in March 1988 and left the group after 1991's *Pop Life* LP

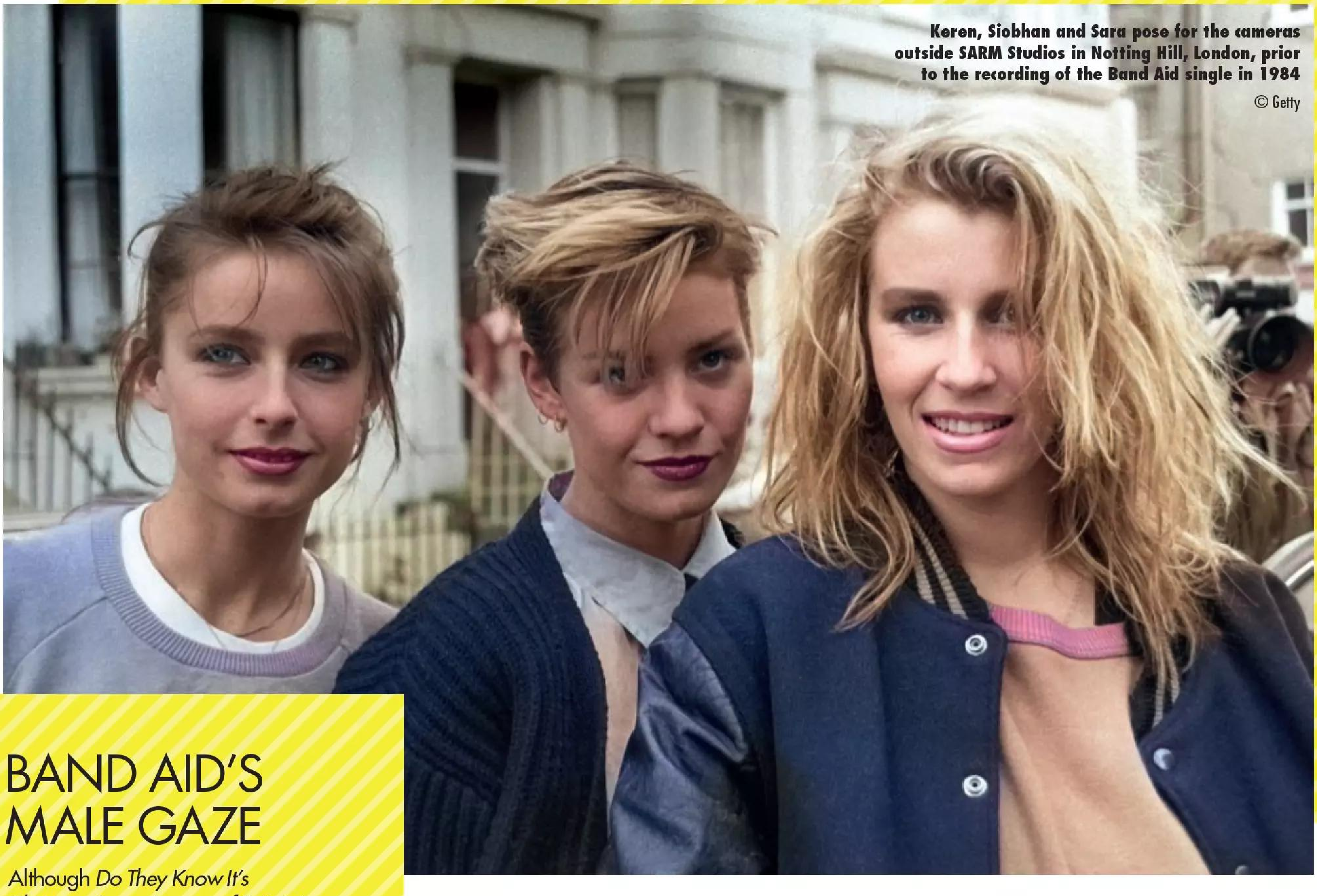
© Getty

READY TO POP

On getting stuck with the more socially aware third album *True Confessions* in 1986, Bananarama enlisted Stock, Aitken Waterman to produce two songs. How encouraging were they for songwriting input? "We had a track record already," Sara points out. "We co-wrote with them, which I don't think they let anyone else do."

True Confessions manages to encompass both the cautionary anti-drug paean *Hooked On Love* and, well, *Venus*. "We went into working with Stock, Aitken and Waterman just wanting to make a really good pop record," emphasises Keren. "It was something different for us, going from quite cool, edgy pop to pure pop – and we loved it." There's another burst of laughter as she adds: "We maybe went too far on the next one."

A year after *True Confessions*, *Wow!* featured megahits *I Heard A Rumour* and *Love In The First Degree*, but Fahey left soon after its release and the trio were also less in control creatively. "There was more encouragement at first writing with Stock, Aitken and Waterman than later on," acknowledges Woodward. "What we did with them early on, they were then almost doing that as a template.



Keren, Siobhan and Sara pose for the cameras outside SARM Studios in Notting Hill, London, prior to the recording of the Band Aid single in 1984

© Getty

BAND AID'S MALE GAZE

Although *Do They Know It's Christmas?* remains one of Britain's best-selling singles of all time and Band Aid is soon to be celebrated with a West End musical, it's been remarked on in recent years how poorly women were represented at its recording in 1984. Other than Bananarama, ex-Shalamar singer Jody Watley was the only female artist present.

It's an under-representation that Bananarama themselves are understanding about. "It's only when you look back that you see how few women were involved," accepts Keren Woodward. "I didn't think about Band Aid in respect of that. Band Aid wasn't about that. It was about the charity and feeding the world, not how many boys or girls there were.

"I was trying to focus on the charity, and what the song was about. That was the real story."

Sara Dallin agrees, adding: "It's only really when other people point it out that you realise how few women were there. The single was full of all the artists who were around at the time – who were mostly men."

Sara's fondest memory was of George Michael's presence. She admits: "George wasn't taken seriously at the time, and when I saw him on the day I thought: 'Here he is, naff old Wham!' When George stood behind me and came out with that voice, my God, I had no idea. I thought: 'You're kidding me! He can do *that*?' He was brilliant."

"But that's not to criticise them. I bloody adore Pete Waterman, who's the biggest music enthusiast you'll ever meet. Any cynicism didn't come from him. Matt and Mike were more musically talented, but they didn't have Pete's direction. It's why they were such a good team."

"I love *Wow!* and they were brilliant songwriters," emphasises Dallin. "You can't really argue with their record. We've always loved to try different music, and it's always essentially Bananarama."

The 40 songs on *Glorious* – 10 from each decade – back up Sara's claims of consistency. In 1991, *Pop Life*, Bananarama's sole album with Jacquie O'Sullivan, samples The Stone Roses and features The Gipsy Kings. It's probably as far as they've strayed from pop, despite its title.

"I really loved funk and soul growing up, but it's never suited us," says Woodward of the duo's determination to keep it pop. "I'm just not a soul singer. We could try to sing those songs, but it's not going to suit my voice." Sara reasons: "The idea of 'pop' is so broad anyway. Even if it's not thought of in that way, *Wonderwall* is a great pop song. A good pop song is a good pop song."

MOVIN' ON

Since Jacquie left in 1991 after *Pop Life*, it's been Woodward and Dallin all the way, bar 2017's one-off reunion tour with Siobhan. If Bananarama as two lifelong best mates now seems entirely natural, the public were initially reluctant. "We'd had 10 years at the top," shrugs Woodward. "The next generation came along and The Spice Girls were more their group. It wasn't so much that we lost our way, but that music changed around us."

It's the only time Bananarama considered quitting, but it wasn't a serious consideration. Dallin recalls: "You can only do what you want to do, and it's a proper realisation that you have to do what you want, not what you think anyone else might want. It was about finding our own way in that changed scene, wondering if you still want to make music."

By the mid-90s, Sara and Keren had already been made virtually bulletproof by having to endure so much testing idiocy from the industry. "First we faced the gender barrier and then we faced the age barrier," sighs Dallin. "People were ageist towards us from our mid-twenties. When you're 26 and people ask you: 'Surely you're not still going to be doing this when you're *30*?', you just think: 'Sorry, what?' Then, when we had children, the attitude was: 'You're making pop music and you're 30-year-old mothers! Hahaha!'" Although Keren and Sara are as enthusiastic and thoughtful lunch companions as any pop lover could wish for, the look of exasperated contempt that crosses Sara Dallin's face when remembering how Bananarama were sometimes treated as mothers in music is one that could kneecap a major label CEO. Brilliant popstars, yes. But also: don't mess.

> "We were wondering: 'Where do we go now?', and suddenly it felt like we went from treading water to surfing a wave.
>
> SARA DALLIN

For all their determination, Woodward is aware of its challenges, as she reflects: "When I had my son, it wasn't a very comfortable time. One thing had to give, and sadly it was my home life, because I was so desperate to have a career. It's only when you get the chance to look back you realise how desperate a time it all was." Our interview is the day before the wedding of Keren's son, Thomas, whose mother smiles broadly as she considers where her life is now. "I have the best relationship with my son, and at least I kept a roof over our heads."

"Each track [of *Glorious*] is a piece of the jigsaw... Together they create the bigger picture, the story of us as artists. It has been one almighty journey." – Sara Dallin

DRAMA QUEENS

Commercially, Bananarama's lowest point was 2001's *Exotica*, an album only released in France. If you think that means it's a stinker, check the mighty *If* on the new compilation, which would rival *Venus* for sales if it had been released in 1985. "The funny thing is, it's around that time that we became better as songwriters and as live artists," smiles Woodward. "We were better than we'd been in the 80s, which we went through with less confidence, not quite knowing what our talents were. I suddenly thought: 'Right, I know what I'm doing now.' But no-one wanted to know."

They didn't expect much better from 2005's *Drama*. But the era of Girls Aloud and Sugababes recognised where imperious female pop music had started, with *Move In My Direction* becoming Bananarama's first Top 20 hit since *Preacher Man* in 1991.

Italian record label boss and Bananarama megafan Alfonso Gugliucci teamed Keren and Sara with Swedish producers Murlyn for *Drama*. "That was the start of us realising: 'Yeah, we did do all that!'," smiles Woodward. "Having someone who was so excited to be making a record with us made us feel rejuvenated." Dallin: "We were wondering: 'Where do we go now?', and suddenly we were having an easy, fun time, writing songs in a hotel in Stockholm. It felt like we went from treading water to surfing a wave... I might put that in a song."

The *Drama* tour also marked the start of Bananarama working with their live band. One reason for 2017's reunion with Fahey is that the original trio never had the chance to play live, an experience that first happened touring *Wow!* with Jacquie in 1988, shortly after Siobhan had left.

"That world tour for *Wow!* was terrifying, frankly," says Sara. "We were thinking: 'God, I've never done this before, what the hell am I doing?' and it was straight into huge shows. Whereas now, playing live is such a laugh. Getting our own band made the difference."

They have particularly fond memories of touring the US in 2012, playing intimate venues in association with the Hard Rock chain for breast cancer charity Pinktober: "Just us and the band, where we became a proper rock & roll experience," according to Keren, as Dallin says: "The Las Vegas crowd were particularly enthusiastic. The next morning, we were walking around the Hard Rock Hotel, looking at the old dears on the fruit machines, fags on the go. One of whom was me, obviously. It's so funny how you can be completely anonymous when you're not on stage."

MIXES AND MELODIES

The deluxe edition of *Glorious: The Ultimate Collection* adds a disc of remixes. Sara picks Luke Million's overhaul of *Velvet Lies* as her favourite, reasoning: "I like it when remixes keep a sentiment of the melody." By contrast, Woodward says: "I love it when remixers reimagine the song. I've been in clubs before and thought: 'That's a great track,' then realised a minute later: 'Hang on, that's one of our songs!' There's a

30 years after they parted ways, the girls reunited with original member Siobhan Fahey (centre) for a UK tour in 2017

© Getty

Sara and Keren joined a bill that included Soft Cell, Tears For Fears and Kylie at BBC Radio 2 In The Park in September

genius to giving it their own treatment."

One of the standout remixes is a slick funk workout of *Tripping On Your Love* from *Pop Life* by George Michael. "George didn't do that as a friend thing," insists Dallin. "He would never have done it if he hadn't loved the song." Keren reveals: "When we played the original to George, he said: 'I really love that. Can I remix it?' That's a big endorsement."

It was the only time the friends collaborated. "The idea of working together never really came up, because it was just a normal friendship," explains Woodward. "We weren't sat there saying: 'Hey, let's do a song together.' We mostly played silly party games with George." Sara: "George was mostly angry with us, as we beat him at every game we played. George would be fuming: 'It's not fair playing you two, you know what each other is thinking.'

"Our friendship was basically that and us laughing at George because he'd got his wellies stuck in the mud."

Despite their closeness, George had one firm rule: he wouldn't let Keren and Sara meet Elton John. Dallin laughs: "George liked us because we're honest. And we were maybe too honest with him, because he'd say: 'I can't take you to meet Elton, you'll just embarrass me.' We'd never have shown George up in front of Elton, of course." Have they ever met Elton? "No!" says an aghast Woodward. "But his husband David is lovely, he always comes to our shows."

"I can't take you to meet Elton, you'll just embarrass me!" – George Michael

© Getty

Also in the *Glorious* deluxe edition is a photo book featuring some of the items from Bananarama's looks over the years, from square-toed Vivienne Westwood boots to Jean-Paul Gaultier fishnet bodices. "We work closely with all our designers on our sleeves," says Sara. "We don't want to put anything out that we don't approve of."

If the original trio were skint when they started, fashion has always been important to them. "We wanted to look glamorous in a way that we could afford, which meant going to places like Kensington Market," recalls Keren. "Glamour meant different ideas to everyone when Bananarama started. You could look how you wanted, so everyone had their own look."

"There never was a defining Bananarama look," considers Dallin. "We were punky and really creative with our clothes. That's why we stood out, but all the bands stood out in their own way because they were creative, too, whether it was Duran or Culture Club. People sometimes try to dress as Bananarama at 80s parties, but they just throw on headbands, legwarmers and ra-ra skirts. I doubt we ever wore those." Sara raises her eyes in frustration. "*Horrendous.*"

A DIFFERENT TAKE

Because of its 10 songs per decade remit, what *Glorious* doesn't include is some of Bananarama's hits, such as *Shy Boy* or *Na Na Hey Hey Kiss Him Goodbye*. Woodward's eyes roll straight out of her head and off the deli table when this is raised, as Dallin points out: "We'd have needed 60 songs to fit everything on." Recovering her composure, Keren reasons: "Do people only want Greatest Hits compilations? Fans will already own those songs, and another hits compilation would be the same thing they've always had. Let's do something different and show our whole career, the songs the two of us think represent Bananarama best."

In discussing their whole career, it's nice to report that Keren and Sara have met up with Siobhan since the reunion tour, at the

FEELING THE LOVE

New compilation *Glorious* features two fresh songs: recent single *Feel The Love*, plus the equally ecstatic *Supernova*, both made with regular co-writer and producer Ian Masterson.

"We've recently made seven songs," reveals Keren Woodward. "We weren't sure how many to put on *Glorious*. The two we chose are euphoric, they make me want to throw my hands up and dance. They've got the feeling that we've been doing this for 40 years and we're lucky to do what we do."

Sara Dallin nods in agreement, adding: "All the recent songs we've written are very positive. They've got different viewpoints – some are more personal – but there's an overwhelming euphoria there. *Feel The Love* was a funny one, because at first we said to Ian: 'Not sure about this one, that hook sounds like the *Casualty* theme.' We went back to it while Ian was writing alternative songs and spotted potential in another section of the track. We developed it from there."

What will happen to the other five songs? "No plans, as usual," responds Keren. "They'll pop up somewhere, or they won't. It's good that we don't have that pressure for new music."

Glorious is promoted with a pair of shows at London Palladium on 3-4 April 2024. "We still play every show wondering: 'Will anyone come?'," frets Keren. "The Palladium has so much history, we were asking our manager when the first show went on sale: 'Are you sure?', only for us to be told: 'Yes! It's sold out!'"

Sara and Keren celebrate 40 years of hits with The Ultimate Party taking place at the legendary London Palladium on 3-4 April 2024
© Jack Alexander

> "We do things in our own time in our own way. It's purely for us, not the industry.
> SARA DALLIN

2021 launch of stylist David Thomas' book, *Vanity Project*. "We won't see each other for a long period, but when we do, we fall straight back into it," smiles Dallin. "Siobhan has the same humour as us and I love her company. She lives in L.A. and we have very different lives, but we fall about laughing when we see each other."

They haven't seen Jacquie "in a long time," but Woodward stresses: "That's just our lives moving along and doing different things. Like with Siobhan, Jacquie is someone who we could go years not seeing but we pick it up straight away when we do."

For the whole of those 40 years, Bananarama has been those two teenage best mates from Bristol. The world has finally caught up with Sara Dallin and Keren Woodward, and realises respect is due. "We rode the wave in the 80s, slightly not in control," reflects Sara. "Since we released *In Stereo* on our own label four years ago, we've shown we can do this on our own. We're so proud of that, and *Masquerade* is my favourite album we've ever done, though *Drama* runs it close. We do things in our own time in our own way. It's purely for us, not the industry. After everything we've been through, that's big."

Bananarama's taxi is waiting, as Keren has wedding duties to oversee. Her final words summarise that Bananarama are where they should have always been: "Where I am now makes up for all the years when it was hard. We do what we want to do, when we want to do it. We make the decisions ourselves, and they seem to be working. Bananarama now? I think to myself: 'Hello, we're doing alright here!'"

● *Glorious: The Ultimate Collection* is released on 8 March 2024 via In Synk. Bananarama play London Palladium on 3-4 April. They will also headline the 80s Classical event at Millennium Square, Leeds, on 20 July. Tickets at millsqleeds.com.

FROM THE OPENING HOWL OF RAW EMOTION TO ITS CONCLUDING RALLYING CRY, *HOTTER THAN JULY* IS A CELEBRATION OF VITALITY, EXPRESSED WITH UNBRIDLED JOY AND STEVIE WONDER'S INSTINCTIVE MUSICALITY

© Getty

CLASSIC ALBUM

HOTTER THAN JULY
STEVIE WONDER

THE MOTOWN LEGEND'S FIRST RECORD OF THE 80s WAS A BACK-TO-BASICS RETURN TO FORM. A TIGHT COLLECTION IN WHICH STEVIE PLAYS IT SAFE WITH HIS TRADEMARK FUNKY SOULFUL POP BUT DELIVERS A PUNCH THROUGH ARDENT POLITICAL ACTIVISM.

FELIX ROWE

"I hear music in colours." So once sang a certain *Classic Pop* favourite (that's Stephen Duffy, by the way). It's an evocative notion that conjures up rich imagery in the mind's eye; a feast for the senses whereby sounds are expressed in a vibrant palette of hues. But if the idea could be said to embody any musician, then first in line must surely be Stevie Wonder.

For someone who has been without sight since infancy, Stevie Wonder not only hears music in colours, he sees – and paints – colours through music. *Hotter Than July* is the perfect embodiment of that. Just like the album cover itself that glows in sun-dappled fervour, the music within is positively bursting with colour. The kind of warm, inviting, fully-saturated tones that instantly emit the feelgood factor. It radiates energy in that totally unique and refreshing way that only Stevie knows how.

From the opening howl of raw emotion to its concluding rallying cry, *Hotter Than July* is a celebration of vitality, expressed with unbridled joy and Wonder's instinctive musicality. But underneath the record's exterior, there's a second layer that throbs with deep-rooted politics and social activism. Again, this duality is reflected in the packaging: flipping the cover image of Stevie in sweating ecstasy will reveal a portrait of Martin Luther King Jr on the inner sleeve, flanked by photographs portraying (white) police brutality against Black civilians and peaceful protesters. This stark imagery is accompanied by a dedication calling for King's birthday to be officially recognised as a national holiday, while seeking an end to "bitter confrontation and inevitable bloodshed."

ONE INTRIGUING OFFSHOOT OF STEVIE'S BLINDNESS IS THAT HIS BODY CLOCK IS NOT CALIBRATED TO NIGHT AND DAY. HE WOULD WORK AT ANY HOUR AND EXPECT HIS TEAM TO BE READY.

To the uninitiated, the ubiquitous *Happy Birthday* – with its sugar-rush nursery-rhyme chorus – could be dismissed as a slightly anodyne, corny-but-harmless soundbite, custom-made for singing birthday cards. In fact, it's a deeply political call to action to counter social injustice and inequality. Like *Born In The USA* a few years later, the buoyant singalong chorus obscures the harder-hitting message of the verse. Wonder's silky delivery can be too sickly sweet for some tastes. But, to guarantee its effect, he's canny enough to sugar-coat the pill to make sure it's swallowed.

Elsewhere *Cash In Your Face* tackles the injustices of racial discrimination via some of Stevie's most direct lyrics – pitched as a conversation in which a Black man is turned down for a tenancy based on the colour of his skin, regardless of his ample funds or 'respectable' job. Meanwhile, Wonder's Bob Marley tribute *Master Blaster (Jammin')* touches on race politics, noting that "the world's full of problems" while referencing the recent war in Zimbabwe. Ultimately, though – and this is characteristic throughout – the underlying message remains positive and celebratory.

The heat metaphor of the album's title and artwork, then, takes on several meanings. While it was released after a particularly scorching summer, the rising temperate reflects the mood of the nation. It's a political heat – the sense of tension bubbling up, pressure reaching boiling point, ready to explode. This immediacy presents a stark contrast to the meandering, bucolic nature of its predecessor, *Journey Through The Secret Life Of Plants*.

Throughout the 70s, Stevie enjoyed a phenomenal run of classic cuts working with TONTO's Expanding Head Band, from *Music Of My Mind* through to *Songs In The Key Of Life*. Each release pushed him artistically, while reaping rewards critically and commercially. But a decade that should have culminated in celebration ended on a somewhat damp note.

Whilst 1979's *Journey Through The Secret Life Of Plants* didn't exactly tank, nor was it received with the universal adulation Wonder had become accustomed to. Given that it was a soundtrack to accompany a TV documentary, largely comprising instrumentals, maybe that shouldn't have come as a surprise.

It seems a little unfair to label his next album a 'comeback', but there's certainly a feeling of getting back to business on *Hotter Than July*. At 10 songs, it's succinct and focused, with not a meandering instrumental in sight. Stevie sticks to the script and keeps to the point, condensing each track down to the good stuff. It's even sequenced like a mixtape, one track often switching straight into the next with barely a second to catch your breath.

Stevie during his six-night stand at Wembley for the Hotter Than July Music Picnic shows in 1980

© Getty

THE SONGS

1 DID I HEAR YOU SAY YOU LOVE ME

Hotter Than July opens with a swooshing crescendo, the build-up of heat and pressure, before Wonder releases the tension in an instant with a screaming "Yow!" And so the funky onslaught begins. He's straight into business with an incessantly groovy workout from the rhythm section, with syncopated horn stabs. At the height of its intensity and momentum, it ends abruptly like a radio changing channel into the next track.

2 ALL I DO

The origins of this track go way back to 1966, when a young Stevie co-wrote it with Motown's Clarence Paul and Morris Broadnax. This particular incarnation is the type of fabulously funky slow jam with woozy chords and retro-future bass synths that's found favour with Thundercat and Childish Gambino in recent years. *All I Do* is seriously funky in an understated way, enhanced by subtle and shimmering flutes that flutter gently, almost hidden in the mix. Like the opener, it gradually

THE PLAYERS

STEVIE WONDER

Stevie plays many of the instruments on the record, including all drums save for three of the tracks.

NATHAN WATTS

Stevie's regualr bassist since the mid-70s, and musical director for his live band. Watts is kept busy – and one cannot underplay the role of his syncopated basslines in pinning the groove together. Wonder and Watts are two halves of the same beast, intuitively anticipating each other's moves.

LON NEUMANN

The studio engineer who came with the all-important truck, before forging a friendship with Stevie and continuing to work with him for many years. He was employed on the technical side to ensure the smooth running and fix technical issues.

DENNIS DAVIS

Davis was recruited to play on three songs, including the colossal reggae lead single, *Master Blaster*. Davis, who played on *Journey Through The Secret Life Of Plants* is best known as David Bowie's drummer of choice throughout the 70s.

THE O'JAYS

Members of Ohio R&B group the O'Jays, Eddie Levert and Walter Williams were two of the many successful artists in their own right queueing up to lay down backing vocals for Stevie. Others included Michael Jackson, members of The Gap Band, Wonder's ex-wife Syreeta Wright, and The Supremes' Susaye Greene Brown.

builds in intensity. Listen closely, you might just hear Michael Jackson performing backing vocals.

3 ROCKET LOVE

Another slow jam; extremely sparse with oodles of space in its minimalist arrangement, as Wonder sings sweetly in ad-libbed "doo doo"s. A slightly sinister mood is evoked by the chromatic riff that has become a signature in 007 movie scores (and what a fantastic alternative Bond theme this would have made). *Rocket Love* features an intricate and inspired string arrangement from Funk Brother, Paul Riser, that adds to the grandiose atmosphere, alongside fingerpicked acoustic guitars. From understated beginnings, it ramps up to a rousing, screaming vocal from Stevie, exorcising his soul demons. It's the kind of soulful ballad that John Legend has made his bread and butter.

4 I AIN'T GONNA STAND FOR IT

Something so totally different and initially jarring that many listeners may have done a double-take just to be sure a random Johnny Cash track hasn't snuck its way onto the playlist. *I Ain't Gonna Stand For It* kicks off with strummed acoustic guitar chords and a most un-Wonder-like vocal – low, raspy and growling like a spit-n-sawdust bar-stool bawler. Is that really Stevie? He's having fun with a country song pastiche with its slide guitar and curiously straight drive-time drums, before it gets back to more familiar ground with the funky *Superstition*-esque clavinet in the chorus, featuring backing vocals from The Gap Band. There's some seriously funky slap bass from Nathan Watts in the outro coda over duelling guitars and Wonder wailing, before again ending abruptly like a colossal freight train coming to an instant stop. Eric Clapton did a faithful cover on his 2001 album, *Reptile*.

5 AS IF YOU READ MY MIND

A jittery piano intro, very busy, almost calypso or bossa nova-like in its frantic rhythm and the first and only track on the record to showcase Wonder's signature harmonica. It's one of the busiest arrangements on the album, very funky and catchy, though leaving little space for the ear to rest. *As If You Read My Mind* has a notable acid jazz feel – laying a clear pathway for 90s UK groups like Brand New Heavies and Jamiroquai.

6 MASTER BLASTER (JAMMIN')

After the funk onslaught of the previous track, *Master Blaster* is a breath of fresh air. Stevie's biggest hit off the LP is an ode to Bob Marley, with whom he had recently toured, and who's both namechecked in the song and referenced in the title. The album itself takes its name from the opening lines, again a reference to a Marley concert on a scorching day. While the influence and dedication is laid bare, it's still totally and unmistakably Stevie Wonder. Stateside, it topped the R&B charts for seven weeks and made the Top 5 of the Billboard Hot 100. It hit the top spot in New Zealand and just missed it in the UK, at No.2.

7 DO LIKE YOU

One of the more forward-looking tracks, opening with samples of children speaking, before jittery synths come in over a funky beat, enhanced with frenetic cowbell percussion. The funky syncopated brass throughout recalls that of *Sir Duke*, while the samples of speech, coupled with the way the track snaps and pops, inject a fresh, feelgood vibe.

8 CASH IN YOUR FACE

A comparatively slower track, very cool and loaded with street swagger. It contains some of the album's most direct and upfront lyrics about social injustice, delivered via a raw but soulful Stevie vocal. It's all the better for hanging back a little, and its inherent strut gives it the distinct vibe of early hip-hop. All it needs now is De La Soul to pop in for a guest verse, and if it hasn't been sampled by them already, then it jolly well should be.

9 LATELY

A Wonder ballad at its very best, *Lately* is distinctly different to everything that precedes it, so simple and effective in its stripped-back form: just Stevie, piano, a fretless bass and a couple of simple overdubs. It's the kind of melodic melodrama that's custom-built for *X-Factor* auditions and its slow-motion montages. But in Wonder's hands it's pure bliss. A contemporary TV performance around the release highlights his gift for expressing the song's emotion, just the right side of sappy. It's at once life-affirming and devastating. It enjoyed a second lease of life in the 90s, when R&B group Jodeci performed a storming version on *MTV Unplugged*. It went on to become one of their signature tunes, scoring an R&B No.1, and charting notably higher than Stevie's original in the US.

10 HAPPY BIRTHDAY

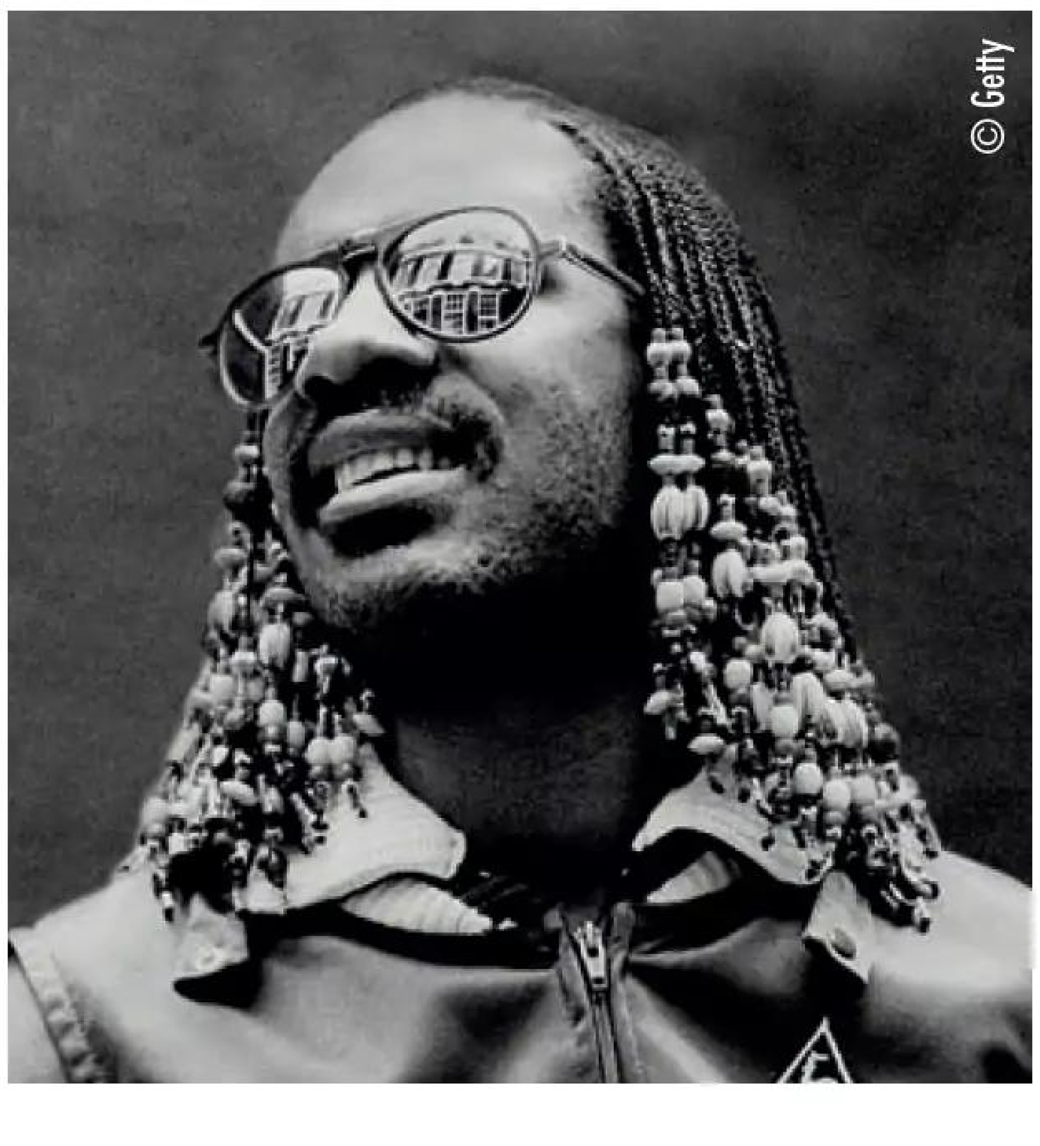
The only track to noticeably use programmed drums (what sounds like a Linn LM-1), and featuring a slightly tinnier pop sound compared to the rest of the record. Curiously, considering its significance in US history and subsequent inception into Stevie's canon, it wasn't released as a single in the States. However, in the UK it was one of his biggest-selling hits, like *Master Blaster (Jammin')* just missing out on the top spot (kept at bay by Michael Jackson with his first UK solo No.1, *One Day In Your Life*). Though musically, it's the weakest and least interesting track on the album, it's without doubt the most culturally significant. It set out with a specific goal – to get Martin Luther King's birthday officially recognised as a national holiday – and it achieved it. *Happy Birthday* has itself become a national institution in the US. Particularly among some Black communities, it has usurped the traditional song to become the definitive birthday celebration, integral as the cake.

STEVIE IN WONDERLAND

Wonder had recently bought his own studio – an obsolete radio studio, at one time favoured by Nat King Cole. By now, it was an empty shell, stripped of all its equipment. All that remained was its incredible acoustics and a lingering sense of Cole's aura. The absence of a control room and equipment was solved by renting a mobile recording truck (of the type used to document live concerts) and backing it up into the parking lot. But this was no ordinary truck. Stevie's steadfast commitment to pushing the envelope gave him access to Sony's trailblazing digital technology. A jumbled mass of cables was uncoiled from the truck into the performance room and voilà: a fully functioning recording studio. All it needed now was a name: 'Wonderland'.

Studio technician, Lon Neumann, came with the truck. Speaking to *Okayplayer* in 2020, Neumann recalls those incredible sessions working "elbow-to-elbow" with Wonder in that cosy space. The typical workflow involved the core band laying down the foundation of a track, before Stevie went back to tinker with parts and overdubs, phrase by phrase, to achieve the total perfection he demanded. The band's musicality was particularly evident in bassist and de facto bandleader, Nathan Watts, who was in perfect sync with Wonder. Guests included a cripplingly shy Michael Jackson, dropping in flanked by his personal bodyguard, to record backing vocals among several other Motown and soul alumni. As for Stevie himself, Lon describes being acutely aware that he was in the presence of a genius.

According to Neumann, one intriguing offshoot of Wonder's blindness is that his body clock is not calibrated to night and day like



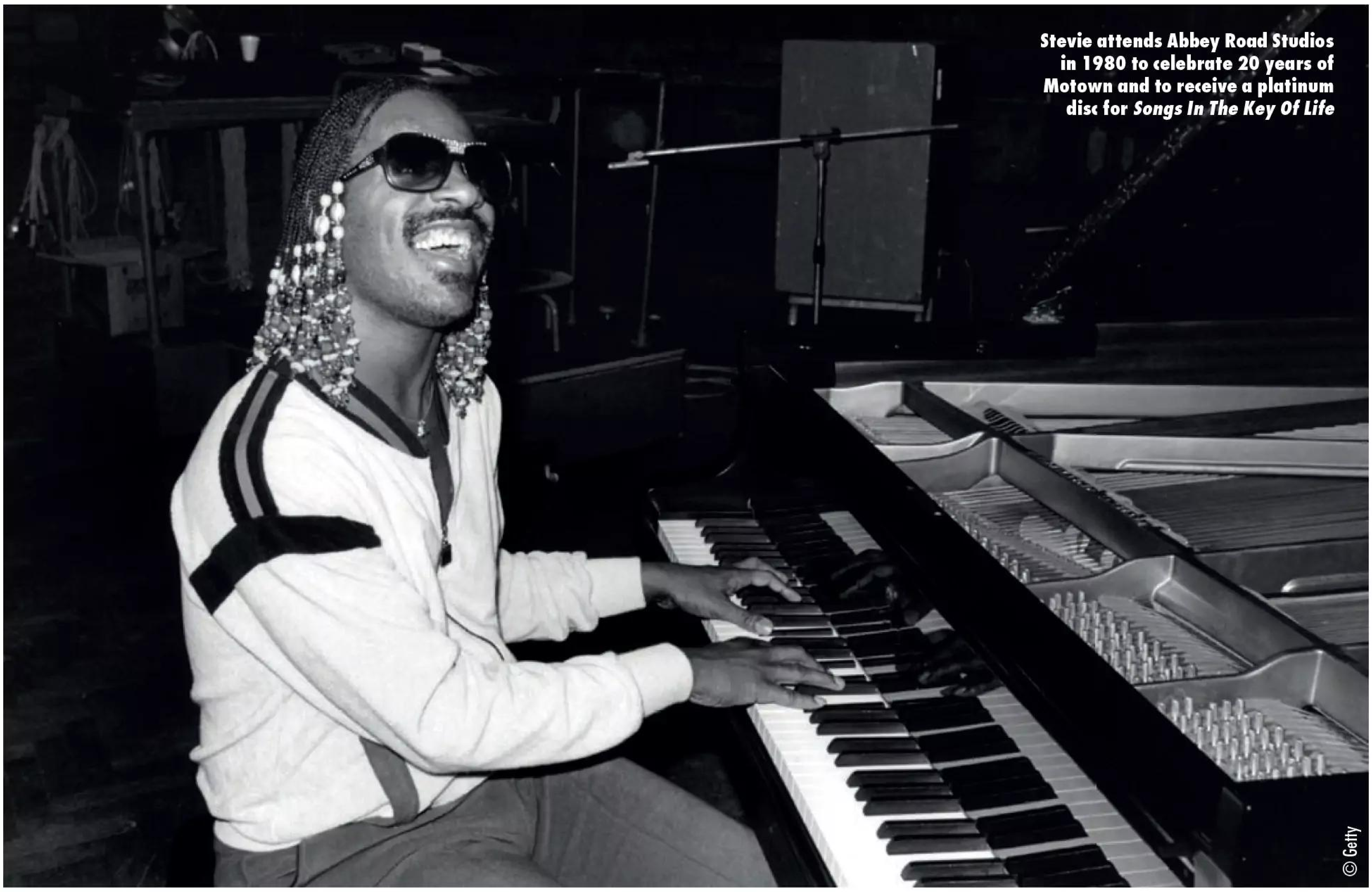
© Getty

everyone else. He would work at any hour and expect his team to be ready when inspiration struck. Invariably, this meant a 3am summons via pager... only to then be kept waiting. When Stevie wasn't committing his genius to tape, he was constantly glued to his special Braille-equipped phone, engaged in multiple calls at once to the great and the good – presumably, just calling to say he loved them.

Wonder's array of equipment included a prestige Bösendorfer grand piano that would set one back the price of a comfortable house, famed for possessing several extra keys beyond the standard 88-note keyboard. Because, you know, Stevie just needs that little extra.

Neumann recalls L.A.'s go-to piano tuner being called in, to make the tone brighter for a particular vibe Wonder was after. The piano tuner used his tried-and-tested hack: coating lacquer onto the hammers that strike the piano's strings to add that special 'zing'. However, when he employed a heat-shrinking gun to help the lacquer dry a little quicker, the highly flammable concoction swiftly combusted, setting Stevie's treasured instrument ablaze. Literal proof that Wonder's keyboard is indeed smoking hot.

As to the sound they forged, it's harking back rather than pushing forwards. Musically,



Stevie attends Abbey Road Studios in 1980 to celebrate 20 years of Motown and to receive a platinum disc for *Songs In The Key Of Life*

© Getty

Hotter Than July is fundamentally rooted in the funky R&B-soul hybrid that Stevie perfected in the 70s: an organic, natural, groovy sound, played by living beings and bursting with humanity. This is Wonder absolutely cruising on familiar ground and well-travelled roads. Not coasting on auto-pilot, but comfortable and in total control.

The only genre outlier is the fantastic single, *I Ain't Gonna Stand For It*, in which Stevie does a bizarre-but-fun, gravelly country singer impression, supported by renowned country guitarist Hank DeVito on steel guitar. Yet even this can't hold back the funk by the time it gets to the chorus.

While the game-changing TR-808 and Linn LM-1 drum machines were both released in this year, neither of them makes much of an appearance on *Hotter Than July* with the exception of the latter possibly featuring on *Happy Birthday*.

Though Wonder was certainly playing with them in his creative process (as an impromptu performance at Abbey Road for *Newsnight* highlighted), they were more writing aides as opposed to style choices utilised for their rigid mechanical aesthetic.

To some degree, *Hotter Than July* marks the end of Wonder's reign as an R&B innovator. A burgeoning breed of sleek, taut, future-funk was beginning to explore fresh ground – clearly indebted to Stevie's innovations, yet also taking cues from other sources: the emerging synth-pop, electronic dance music and New Wave. Michael Jackson and Prince would soon release landmark albums that shaped the next decade, and indeed the very future of pop.

For the first time, Wonder was beginning to sound a little out of step with the current cool kids. His biggest hit was yet to come (1984's saccharine worldwide No.1, *I Just Called To Say I Love You*), but by that point he was the established veteran playing it safe, not the young maverick innovator he once was.

Hotter Than July is perhaps, then, the last great Stevie album. While it sits proud beside his finest records of his 70s sweet spot, it doesn't quite match their vision or breadth of scope. But it excels in its sheer zest for life. Speaking to *Jazzwise* in 2019, bassist Avishai Cohen selected *Hotter Than July* as his life-changing album, summing it up as "one big chunk of happiness". It's just pure joy. A funk workout of the highest calibre, displaying incredible dexterity and an immensely satisfying experience for the ears.

Hotter Than July doesn't break new ground for Wonder, but it celebrates the territory already hard fought and won. If it's not hugely radical by his own great standards, it's (just) fantastic pop music, meticulously crafted. However, the real power of *Hotter Than July* is the impassioned political message nestled within its jubilant grooves. The call for racial equality remains extremely prescient today in context of Black Lives Matter and ongoing debates over representation and police brutality in the United States. Stevie's form of activism centres on peaceful progress, finding common ground and reasons to celebrate.

No surprise then that the album lends its name to a Detroit-based festival celebrating the Black LGBT community. *Hotter Than July*'s final track, *Happy Birthday* proves that – just sometimes – a pop song really can transcend its form and work wonders.

THE VIDEO

MASTER BLASTER (JAMMIN')

Released pre-MTV, before regular promos were commonplace, only one official video was produced to promote *Hotter Than July*: a simple performance video of Wonder and his band playing the track 'live' on stage, synced to the studio recording. (Well, almost synced, discounting the ad-libbed scat sections towards the end where the video editor apparently conceded defeat.) It was recorded on a huge stage in a large auditorium, without an audience present. No trickery, no special effects, no groundbreaking visuals, just Stevie doing what Stevie does best. And when Stevie does what Stevie does best, is there really any need for anything else?

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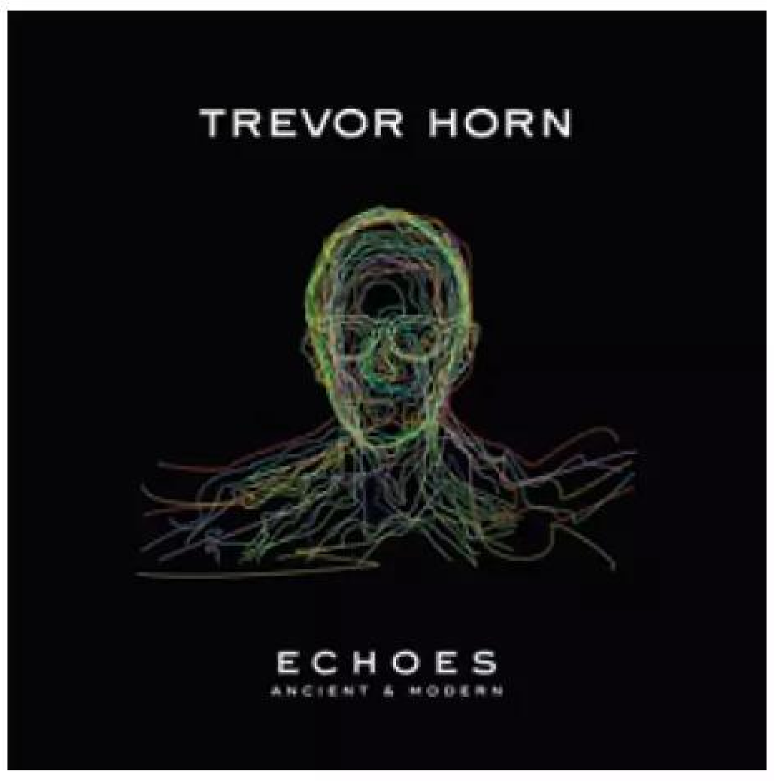


"TWO TRIBES WAS LIKE DRIVING A CAR OFF A CLIFF!"

HE'S THE MAN WHO DEFINED THE SOUND OF THE 80s. NOW TREVOR HORN IS BACK WITH AN AUDACIOUS SOLO ALBUM THAT REINVENTS A WHOLE HOST OF CLASSIC SONGS FEATURING AN ALL-STAR CAST OF COLLABORATORS INCLUDING SEAL, MARC ALMOND, RICK ASTLEY AND IGGY POP. WE MEET THE PRODUCER WHO TAKES US BEHIND ITS CREATION AS WELL AS HIS FORMER LIFE SHAPING THE SONIC LANDSCAPE OF THE CHARTS.

SIMON PRICE

Not all wizards wear capes. Some wear thick-rimmed glasses. Trevor Horn is the Emeritus Professor figure of the New Pop of the 1980s. Sipping a mug of tea in a conservatory on a grotty English autumn afternoon, he has the relaxed but authoritative air of a man who has nothing left to (im)prove.

Between 1979 – his arrival as leader of the Buggles – and the petering out of the Frankie Goes To Hollywood project circa 1986, Trevor Horn established himself as the producer who all other practitioners of the pristine called 'boss'. His rise truly began when he coaxed the washed-up pop duo Dollar into making the best three singles of their career, pulling a similar Henry Higgins-esque stunt to that carried off by Nile Rodgers and Bernard Edwards with Sister Sledge, and creating a sonic calling card from which all else followed, most importantly ABC's still-peerless *The Lexicon Of Love.*

Along the way there were excursions into avant-pop with Malcolm McLaren and with his own Art Of Noise collective, the founding of the pioneering ZTT label ("Gosh, ZTT, that was a time", he understates), and even a brief stint as a member of Yes (a gig for which wearing a cape might well be excused). As a producer, he also applied his Fairlight-and-faders magic to, among others, Propaganda, Grace Jones, Godley & Creme, Spandau Ballet and, of course, the aforementioned Frankie. By that group's mid-80s zenith Horn had, perhaps more than any other individual of that era, changed the sound of pop, bringing to it a new cleanliness, precision and perfection. Further successes followed, notably with Seal, but his work as an architect was done,

Horn Of Plenty: Trevor has worked with everyone from ABC and Frankie Goes To Hollywood to Grace Jones, Pet Shop Boys and his favourite artist, Seal

© Solar Jupiter Photography

© Solar Jupiter Photography

Echoes **follows the producer's 2019 project *Trevor Horn Reimagines The Eighties* that featured All Saints, Robbie Williams, Simple Minds and Tony Hadley**

"WHEN MARC SINGS 'WE ARE YOUNG', IT PUTS IT IN A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT CONTEXT. IT MAKES IT LIKE A TORCH SONG..."

creating the shimmering citadel of possibilities in which others could play.

In the 20th century, one constant thread through Horn's projects has been a desire to re-evaluate and re-frame his greatest moments in a more artful manner than merely whacking out a compilation and touring the hits.

The Producers, a band he formed with 10cc alumnus Lol Creme but sadly never considered calling Creme Horn ("We'd put those two things together occasionally, in some contexts, but mainly as a joke") recorded one album of original material, 2012's *Made In Basing Street,* but their most extraordinary moment came when they deconstructed/reconstructed Frankie's *Two Tribes* on camera for Holy Moly (a clip which has almost half a million views).

© Etienne Gilfillan

Marc Almond covers Pat Benatar's *Love Is A Battlefield* on Trevor Horn's new album

In 2019 he released *Trevor Horn Reimagines The Eighties,* a collection of orchestral covers of pop standards (some of them his own work originally), with well-known guests. If there was one criticism of *Reimagines,* it was that orchestral reworkings were hardly an original concept. However, his new album *Trevor Horn Presents Echoes – Ancient & Modern* takes a more imaginative approach, pairing another stellar guest list with non-obvious songs, given radically different productions. It sets out its stall by opening with Tori Amos' cinematic interpretation of Kendrick Lamar's *Swimming Pools (Drank).* The doyenne of the double piano covering a hip-hop track is a counter-intuitive start, signalling to the listener that anything can happen from hereon in.

"The idea for that came from my engineer," explains Horn. "I was giving a monologue about lyrics. And he said, 'The best lyric I've heard in the past year is this Kendrick Lamar track.' He started to recite it to me. And, of course, it's great. So I listened to the record. And then he came in the next day and said, 'Well, how about these chords?' So we've got this revolving chord sequence. And then we sent a demo to Tori, and she did a really great version in American soundchecks, then we recorded it. I thought vocally she did a great job, particularly the backing vocals. She just threw herself right into it, you know? You can't buy that sort of commitment."

To hear Trevor, a man perceived as the ultimate soundhead, emphasising lyrics may seem surprising, but the thinking behind *Echoes* was very much words-first. "It was a little bit like going back and picking songs that I liked the lyrics of, and seeing if I could do it in a different way," he says. "But still enhance the idea of what the lyric was about."

Those songs include *Smells Like Teen Spirit, Relax, Owner Of A Lonely Heart, Love Is A Battlefield*, as well as *Steppin' Out, Slave To The Rhythm, Personal Jesus, Drive* and *White Wedding*. The starry guests include former Horn collaborators Seal and Marc Almond alongside Rick Astley, Iggy Pop, Jack Lukeman, Andrea Corr, Toyah, Robert Fripp, Steve Hogarth and Lady Blackbird.

Sometimes, the pairing shouldn't work, but somehow does. Take *Love Is A Battlefield*, a song which, especially when coupled with its video, originally carried a flavour of romantic teenage runaways (even though Pat Benatar was 30 when she recorded it). The vocalist here, delivering the refrain "We are young", is Marc Almond, a 66-year-old man. "For an older man to say 'Love is a battlefield' is a pretty valid thing, too," counters Trevor. "I'm sure at times love *has* been a battlefield for Marc, as it has for all of us."

The reason it works, of course, is that Marc, using what Trevor describes to his old ZTT sidekick Paul Morley in the LP's sleevenotes as his "wounded, but undefeated" voice, is a great *interpreter* of other people's songs. It's the reason he was able to sing Cher's *A Woman's Story* in the 80s, despite not being a woman.

"Yeah, Marc's voice has got a lot of character. There's something sort of quite classic about it. I always loved the original record, I loved the drum machine – I'm pretty sure it was a Linn. But I never thought too much about it. Because one of the problems with records from the 80s was that you have a picture of a video in your head. With records from the 60s, I don't remember any videos, I just remember the song. And when Marc sings 'We are young', it puts it in a completely different context. It makes it like a torch song..."

The idea of covering *Personal Jesus* came to Horn in a Californian gridlock.

"I never really became a fan of Depeche Mode till I was stuck in a massive traffic jam in America. Twelve lanes of freeway jammed, sitting there in a car and feeling kind of, 'What am I doing here? This is terrible.' And then *Personal Jesus* came on. And it reminded me of a folk tune from England. And I loved that sort of violent horror, in that not-such-a-nice place: It just felt *British*, you know. I missed it. Pet Shop Boys are a good antidote to L.A., too, because you won't hear them on the radio..."

The vocalist on *Personal Jesus* is Iggy Pop, in superb drawling form. And where the Mode original was metallic machine music, Horn and Osterberg's take is human, organic and earthy, with harmonicas and acoustic guitars.

"The idea was 'Let's do it acoustically, like a jugband'. Because you really

From his 1991 debut LP through to 2015's *7*, Horn has worked on six of Seal's studio albums – he also played bass for Seal on tour this year

THE SINGERS #1

STEVE HOGARTH

(DRIVE)

© Anne Marie Forker

Some might find it surprising that the singer with Marillion has a friendship and ongoing collaboration with a pop producer such as Trevor Horn. What brought the two of you together?

"Trevor's partner Janet Andersen has had Marillion on her radar for a while having seen us play in her home town of Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1989. And she had said hello to me a couple of times at various awards ceremonies, which is about the only time I get any nightlife these days – apart from touring. Janet introduced me to Trevor at the *Prog* magazine awards. I was thrilled to meet him. He and Janet invited my wife, Linette and I for dinner at his home in London and, before I knew it, we were collaborating both live and in the studio."

What was the thinking behind your approach to reimagining *Drive*?

"I wanted to sing it like I'd never ever heard it. Listening to the words I realised it's a song speaking to someone who has a problem with alcohol: 'Who's going to drive you home tonight?' So I tried to imagine and to live that situation while I was singing it. Singing is a lot like acting. You have to become the person speaking the words and to live inside them. Then you'll speak the truth to whoever hears it."

What is your favourite classic Trevor Horn production?

"I have loved so much of his work over the years, most notably songs from Seal albums such as *Dreaming In Metaphors* and *Fast Changes*, also *I'll Leave It* from the *90125* album by Yes. My favourite is the immaculate *Slave To The Rhythm*, which I think is quite simply a perfect record."

THE SINGERS #2

JACK LUKEMAN

(WHITE WEDDING AND SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT)

© Getty

There was always an underlying menace to *White Wedding*, but the arrangement you've sung with Andrea Corr puts that in the foreground…
"I think it has all the atmosphere and appeal of a Western gunfight. I love the way Trevor's production has given it a great cinematic open-plains feel, with a little white church in the distance. If anything, it draws the mystery out of the song and enhances the menacing narrative. It's a movie I'd love to see."

What aspects of *Smells Like Teen Spirit* were you and Trevor trying to bring out, with your interpretation?
"I think it was the intimacy and intensity of the lyric. It always sounded like an anxiety-ridden internal conversation to me, and approaching it with a more intimate vocal style brings that out even more. At the time, I was trying to give it the depth and worldliness of a Paul Robeson vocal. I suppose when you break down any song, its true melodic power and emotion comes to the fore, especially if it's as great as *Teen Spirit*. Kurt Cobain had a wonderful ear for melody and an earworm, so I think that shines and stays intact."

What is your favourite classic Trevor Horn production?
"Well it's obviously a treasure trove, and *Video Killed The Radio Star* was the genesis of so much music to follow, but *Owner Of A Lonely Heart* still blows my mind aesthetically because of all the beautiful space in a song that has so many great parts in it. The drum sound alone is revolutionary. And when I first heard *Relax* as a teenager I had never experienced anything like that before. It was totally new sonic continent that Trevor had discovered or invented."

"If you work with Malcolm McClaren, you won't earn much money. But you'll learn." – Jill Sinclair

© Getty

can't compete with that 80s programming. And then the idea of Iggy came up, and I think maybe he agreed to do it, because it was a bit of business for the studio over there during lockdown. But he was really good, so well prepared, and very responsible. The quality of his voice is amazing. But then afterwards, he wanted us to rough the track up a bit, because it was all acoustic with the harmonica and stuff. So we called in Phoebe Lunny [of Brighton punks Lambrini Girls] and she plays very raw guitar."

Which helped to steer it away from sounding like the Johnny Cash version…

"Yeah, I didn't want it to sound like that. What got me with that song was the way it seemed to do something different. Every fucking time. 'Your own personal Jesus, someone to hear your prayer, someone to care… *Dang, dang, dang, dang, dang, dang*… Your own…' The chromatic run is really clever, but it meant I had to have a chord chart every time I played anything on it, because I could never remember. My records can be like that as well. But I never thought of what the song was about. I was taking the song at its face value that it was, you know, Iggy was going to be basically counselling people on the phone at three o'clock in the morning."

SHUFFLING THE DECK

Some of the songs are Trevor's own classics. But it wasn't a case of scratching an itch that had been nagging at him, or fixing what was broken.

"No, I definitely had no desire to do *Relax* again. It was only some mad idea that the record label nagged me about. And one night I just started messing around and saying, what would it be like if it was quite slow, and it actually went, *reee-laaax*, you know?' But we couldn't figure out how to do a vocal. So it just went into a can for a couple of months. And then my engineer, Tim Weidner, put a vocal on it. But he tweaked his voice, probably with AI, so he sounded almost like a robot. And we started to think about getting an actual robot [called, according to the sleevenotes, Erotica] to sing it. Obviously it would be a female robot, because I was trying to do songs that men have done with women, and songs that women have done with men, to try and shuffle the deck."

Then Trevor happened to catch Toyah and Robert Fripp covering *Slave To The Rhythm* on one of their online lockdown shows, and the deck was duly shuffled.

"I've always liked Toyah – I've bumped into her loads of times, she's like a ball of energy. I like her vibe. So they did it. And I think it came out pretty well, even though I was afraid of messing around with it too much. I restrained myself. Robert's solo is definitely one of my favourite guitar solos I've recorded."

The new version is a strikingly different interpretation of what 'sexy' can mean on a record. If the original was pumping away on amyl nitrate in a nightclub, this one is more private and sensual…

"Yes, it's you in a darkened booth. With a robot."

The timespan of *Echoes*' source material is 1982-2012. When we mention what a significant year 1982 was for Trevor, we're expecting some *Lexicon Of Love* nostalgia. Instead, he embarks on an enthusiastic memory trip about the project he began later that year, Malcolm McLaren's *Duck Rock*.

© BMG Music

"The man who invented the 80s" – Horn won the BRIT for Best Producer in 1983, 1985, and later in 1992. He was appointed CBE in 2011.

"After ABC, I remember my late wife, God bless her, saying there was another act that wanted me to work with them, and it was Malcolm McLaren. And she said, 'If you do Malcolm McLaren, you won't earn much money. But you'll learn.' So I opted for Malcolm, and I went all around the world. And just going to New York at that point in time was an amazing thing, because I had no idea what was going on over there until I actually got there. Going somewhere like Paradise Garage and seeing that whole new way that clubs were, with the sound system. I've listened to speakers all my life, but I've never heard anything like Paradise Garage. That's the first time I ever heard that 'bomb the bass' thing, where they cranked the bass up."

The Mbaqanga-inspired skipping-rope chant *Double Dutch* took McLaren and Horn to racially-segregated South Africa.

"We were locked in a studio in Johannesburg, and it was still Apartheid. I had somewhere between 16 and 20 musicians, of whom some were Zulus and some were Xhosas. We could only get the studio from nine at night till nine the next morning.

"I'VE ALWAYS LIKED TOYAH – I'VE BUMPED INTO HER LOADS OF TIMES, SHE'S LIKE A BALL OF ENERGY."

Toyah Willcox and husband Robert Fripp take on Grace Jones' *Slave To The Rhythm* on the new LP

And Malcolm had recorded all of these sort of township grooves, that he was trying to write songs over, 'Skip they do the Double Dutch...' We basically wrote it as we went along. We bought the skipping ropes, and recorded the skipping. I had a whole troupe of people who did all kinds of things. They had a great time skipping, and I had six female singers that sounded amazing together."

New York, too, was an eye-opener.

"One of the things that attracted me was Malcolm played me the World Famous Supreme Team's live tape. I wish I still had it. I put bits of it on

Horn formed the Buggles with Geoff Downes and went straight to No.1 with 1979 debut 45, ***Video Killed The Radio Star***

© Getty

"LADY BLACKBIRD'S GOT ATMOSPHERE, BUT SHE'S ALSO GOT POWER, SERIOUS POWER... OFF THE SCALE."

the album. That was the first time I ever heard anybody scratch a record, because it was so inconceivable. Then when Malcolm told me that Black kids in New York were really into Depeche Mode, I was like, 'Really?' I couldn't visualise that. But then, when I went to New York, it was like having an education."

NEW YORK STATE OF MIND

To make McLaren's *Buffalo Gals* – widely credited as the first UK hip-hop track – Horn brought the World Famous Supreme Team to London, but was surprised to find them unimpressed by his studio machinery.

"I thought they would love the Fairlight. Because the Fairlight, in a way, was doing digitally what they did physically, but it didn't set them on fire. But they loved the drum machine I had, a DMX. They had the decks, and I had acetates with sampled bits of singing on them that we'd recorded in South Africa, so they had loads of stuff to play with. It was fascinating watching them scratch things over a beat. I was just letting them go, and the recording has loads of it."

The most 'New York' song on *Echoes* is Joe Jackson's *Steppin' Out*. The original was propelled by its famous bassline, which Trevor's version, with Seal on vocals, has excised in order to make it "more like L.A.". Similarly, Trevor once told me *Owner Of A Lonely Heart* by Yes, which he produced, was "the best whizzbang record ever", but his new version shuns both whizzes and bangs.

"Yeah, that song was the peak of whizzbang. Because the track is very simple, *dum-tch-dum-dum-dum-dum, dum-dum,* the bass and drums, there's hardly anything playing in that verse. So when those whizzbangs come in, they come in like a ton of bricks. The particularly famous whizzbang is a combination of quite a lot of things, very carefully put together: a Mini Moog fill, with some orchestral samples, and Synclavier guitars and all kinds of things. It was the best whizzbang ever. So I wasn't even gonna go there with this version."

Instead, there's a sound palette that's closer to an Ibiza chillout LP. The vocal, notably deeper than Jon Anderson's, belongs to Rick Astley.

"Rick had got on stage with us [The Trevor Horn Band] in Japan and sung part of *Owner Of A Lonely Heart* an octave down, so I knew he would be into doing it."

Horn rated Rick's voice long before his current reinvention as the Morrissey it's OK to like.

Andrea Corr reinvents Billy Idol's ***White Wedding*** with fellow Irish singer Jack Lukeman

"Back then, all I heard was *Never Gonna Give You Up*. And he was obviously a good singer, because we didn't have Melodyne and AutoTune back then. I thought his voice was rich in a slightly unusual way. Not like a baritone, but a low tenor quality to it. Obviously, he's a lot older now. Seeing him live in Japan, I was really impressed. Stock, Aitken Waterman were like a factory for dance records. It's gonna be hard to be taken seriously as an artist when your first hit is like that, and you have to go somewhere else."

BLACKBIRD SINGING...

Another Horn classic rebooted on *Echoes* is Grace Jones' *Slave To The Rhythm,* reinterpreted by Lady Blackbird, serendipitously described on her own BMG bio as "the Grace Jones of jazz". But their styles are miles apart. Where Jones is forbiddingly frosty, Blackbird *comes in hot.*

"They're totally different. If you think about all the Grace records that you really like, like *La Vie En Rose,* or *My Jamaican Guy,* Grace is all about creating an atmosphere with a voice. Lady Blackbird's got atmosphere, but she's also got power, serious power, as well. Off the scale, really."

Grace is still a phenomenal performer.

"She's great. I saw her live at the Hollywood Bowl. And it took me probably 20 minutes before I realised that she was naked..."

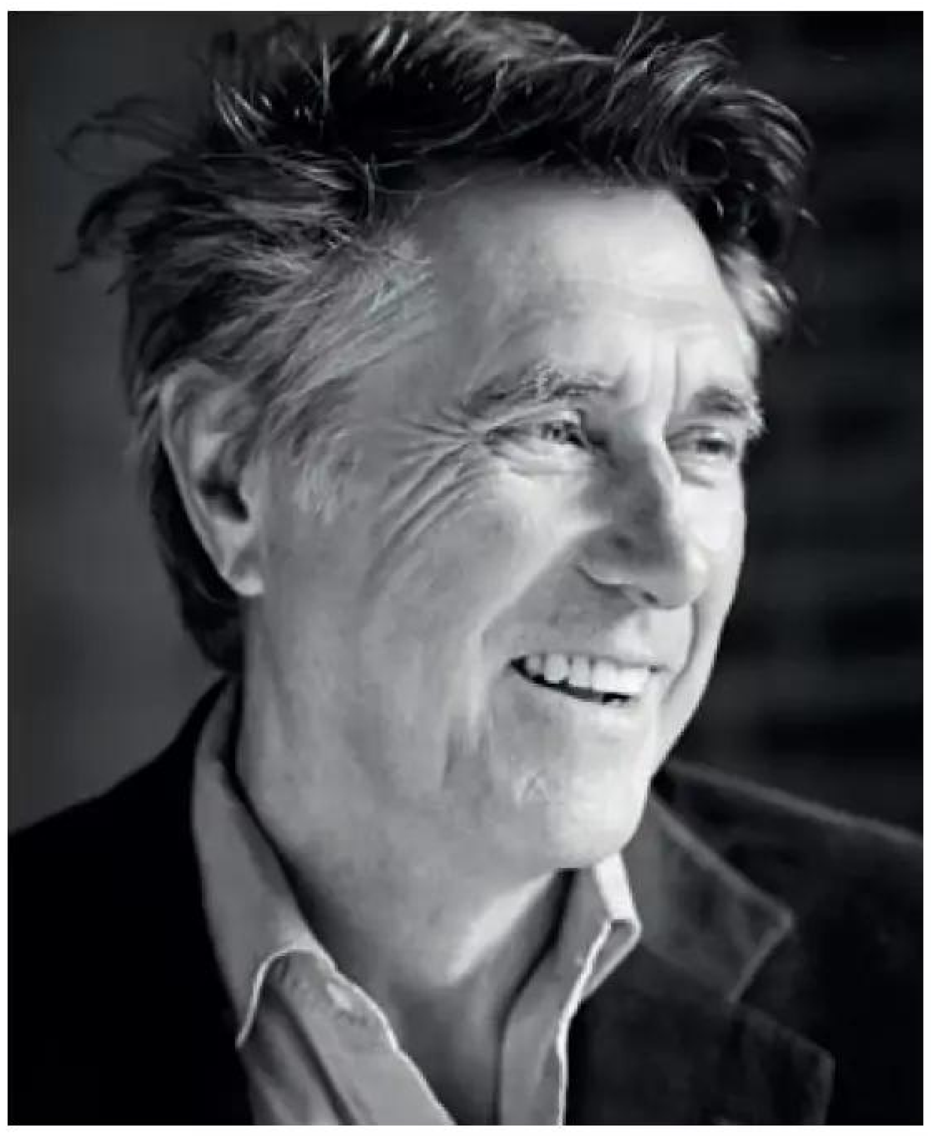
And Steve Hogarth from Marillion is the chosen vocalist on Trevor's version of *Drive* by The Cars.

"I think it's such a sad song. And I wanted to make it sadder. I always loved the song. I kind of liked The Cars, even though they were a little bit too Americana for me, but I always loved the song. It's one of the songs I kind of regretted doing on *Echoes*, but Steve did such a good vocal on it, and that's what kept me going."

Billy Idol's *White Wedding* is reimagined in a sinister American Gothic style, but with two Irish singers: Andrea Corr and Jack Lukeman. This, however, wasn't the original plan.

"Initially, we were thinking Neil Young. [Does an immaculate impression] 'Hey little sisterrr, what have you done?'. Then Andrea Corr called me. I'm so fond of Billy Idol, you know. I did an album with him [*Kings & Queens Of The Underground*] when his book came out. *White Wedding* is such an interesting song as well, because it's about, you know, starting again..."

Lukeman returns on the penultimate track, *Smells Like Teen Spirit,* with an orchestral arrangement that might have sat nicely on Trevor's 80s orchestral album were it not a 90s song, and a



Trevor himself interprets Bryan Ferry for a cover of Roxy Music's 1982 hit *Avalon*

super-deep vocal reminiscent of Kurt's own infamous/legendary *Top Of The Pops* rendition.

"He sings it at least an octave lower than Kurt Cobain. I didn't see Nirvana on *Top Of The Pops* but I saw them do it in the studio on *The Word* on a Friday night. Seal was on, doing *Crazy.* And they were on, doing *Smells Like Teen Spirit,* and I was saying to Seal, 'Great gag, man. This is a great gag, the way the verse goes right down. And then when that chorus comes in, it's brilliant.' I always liked the drummer, Dave Grohl. I've never met him, but I like the Foo Fighters. I like the way that they actually learned *Never Gonna Give You Up* and did a pretty decent job of it. I admire that, you know?"

TRIBAL MUSIC

In the sleevenotes, regarding Nirvana, Trevor tells Paul Morley "I don't really do the angry, the violent." But *Two Tribes* is pretty violent...

"Yeah, well, *Two Tribes* we used to say was like driving a car off a cliff! It had to feel like we're just about to go off the cliff, all the time. That took a lot of nervous energy to get it like that. If that's violent, that's fine. It's teetering on the edge."

© BMG Music

The album ends, in Mike Yarwood "And this is me" style, with a vocal from Trevor himself on Roxy Music's *Avalon*, another 1982 throwback. Turns out this isn't his first Roxy rodeo...

"I was always a fan of Roxy Music, and used to sing their songs on those Woolworths records. You know, [another impression] 'Come on come on, let's stick together', and *Tokyo Joe.* So I thought it would be funny actually doing Bryan Ferry again."

It must have been difficult to hold back from going into a full Ferry parody.

"Well, I got to work with Bryan Ferry. And he's got a terrific voice. It's really quite something. He's got one of those tip of the iceberg voices there's of lot of body in his voice underneath. So I didn't try. But ending with that song made sense: 'Now the party's over...'"

There are digressions and diversions. Horn nearly did *London Calling* with a choir, he tells me. He wishes Frankie would go out and tour properly. He's not a fan of the craze for stripped-down acoustic covers in TV adverts. But the notion of musical deepfakes like Trevor's 70s moonlighting as the Woolies Ferry brings us round to the buzz topic of the day: AI. The Buggles saw it coming, imagining pop "rewritten by machine on new technology" way back in '79...

"Well, that idea in *Video Killed The Radio Star* came from reading JG Ballard [specifically his short story *The Sound-Sweep*]. You know, this idea that people didn't listen to music any more. They just got the emotion, and making music was redundant. I don't think that's happened. The thing is, people call it 'AI', but it's really just stuff that's already happened being regurgitated in a convincing way, isn't it? Well, that's what *we* did. I mean, a lifetime of listening to pop music, you can't help *but,* you know? If I listen to something like *Video Killed The Radio Star* now, I can hear a bit of ABBA in it. You know, everything's a bit of something rehashed... But I've heard it do that thing where it changes your voice into somebody else's. My son sent me a thing of Elvis Presley singing *Video Killed The Radio Star,* right? The trouble was, it was Elvis Presley with my phrasing, which is very unlike Elvis Presley... [Does another immaculate impression] 'I heard you on the wireless back in '52...' Elvis doesn't cut off his notes, you know? 'Lying awake, intently tuning in on you...' That might work a lot better than my original. Oh, no... But Elvis wouldn't phrase it like that."

I point out that I've now heard Trevor Horn doing an impression of AI doing an impression of Elvis Presley doing an impression of Trevor Horn, and we both laugh. If this is the present of messing with the past, maybe the future won't be so bad and we can all... relax. ■

● ***Trevor Horn Presents Echoes: Ancient & Modern*** **is out now via Deutsche Grammophon and reviewed on page 80.**

THE SINGERS #3

MARC ALMOND

(LOVE IS A BATTLEFIELD)

© Etienne Gilfillan

This isn't the first time you've worked with Trevor Horn – he produced half of *Tenement Symphony* in 1991. What does he offer, as a producer, that appeals to you?

"Trevor knows how to bring out the best in a vocalist, he makes you work hard and to try things in different ways. He's an absolute perfectionist and a master of sonics, bringing out chords and sounds that create a heartbeat with drama. You never know which way he's going to go. When I recorded the song it was a ballad when I left it, now it has a dance beat element which is more exciting."

Pat Benatar's original of *Love Is A Battlefield* in 1983 came from the point of view of a young woman. Sung by you, all these years on, the song gains a different meaning...

"Trevor chose the song for me for his album, and I was a bit surprised and tentative at first with the choice, if it would fit me. But there's no gender reference in the song, it's not even particularly from a feminine angle. I think it works for any gender to sing, and it wouldn't have bothered me anyway if it did gender-reference. 'We are young' was a bit odd to sing, as I am most definitely not, but it's possibly a person remembering when they were. I like to think, like everyone does, that I'm young in spirit anyway."

What is your favourite classic Trevor Horn production?

"Many Trevor classics, but *Two Tribes* is a particular favourite and I love his production with Propaganda and ABC. Of all the songs that I have recorded with him, *Hand Over My Heart* is sublime, particularly the coda, and *Jacky* is extraordinary."

PET SHOP BOYS

WITH NEIL TENNANT'S WITTY LYRICS AND CHRIS LOWE'S CULTURED SYNTHS AND BEATS, THE DUO'S CONSISTENTLY STRONG BACK CATALOGUE HELPED TO REDEFINE THE POP LANDSCAPE

JON O'BRIEN

Five years after first bonding over a shared love of Soft Cell and Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark at a King's Road hi-fi store, Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe officially joined the pantheon of British electro-pop duos themselves. The pair's 1986 debut studio album undeniably shared elements of their musical inspirations: the lustful pick-up anthem *I Want A Lover* ("No need for conversation as we're driving home") could have been lifted from *Non-Stop Erotic Cabaret*, while Stephen Hague was recruited in-between producing OMD's *Crush* and *The Pacific Age*. However, *Please* also proved that Pet Shop Boys were capable of carving out their own distinctly arch path.

From Tennant's deadpan delivery and Noel Coward-esque witticisms to Lowe's banks of arpeggiated synths, all the hallmarks of PSB's career are here, coalescing to perfection on *West End Girls*, a tale of inner-city life that remains one of the all-time great No.1 records, both in the UK and US. But like much of the album, its unusual melting pot of mournful trumpets, bustling traffic noise and hip-hop beats didn't come easily.

Indeed, the pair had spent an entire year working with Hi-NRG maestro Bobby Orlando, only to abandon all their efforts after signing with larger-than-life impresario Tom Watkins and major label Parlophone. Luckily, five tracks were rescued by new partner-in-crime Hague, including their transatlantic chart-topper, the melodramatic *Tonight Is Forever* (later revived for their collaboration with Liza Minnelli) and TV soundtrack favourite *Opportunities (Let's Make Lots Of Money)*, a majestic anti-Thatcherite anthem regularly misconstrued as a celebration of yuppie culture.

Suburbia, an ode to the disaffected youth inspired by the Brixton riots of the early 1980s, and the domestic androgyny of closer *Why Don't We Live Together?*, further underlined PSB's penchant for lyrical themes that require deep diving.

But the romantic comedy-friendly sentiment of *Love Comes Quickly*, apparently the first song that the pair ever wrote together, and *Later Tonight*'s unequivocal sense of longing showed they could tackle the straightforward love song, too.

> "ALL THE HALLMARKS ARE HERE, COALESCING ON *WEST END GIRLS*, ONE OF THE ALL-TIME GREAT NO.1 RECORDS"

Smash Hits, the pop bible for which Tennant had previously served as deputy editor, cheekily published a mock obituary in the issue that followed his departure from the mag ("In a matter of weeks, Neil's pop duo Pet Shop Boys will be down the dumper and he'll come crawling back on bended knees"). Front-loaded with four consecutive Top 20 hits, *Please* immediately confirmed that Tennant would never need to grace their offices again.

PLEASE
Released 1986
Label Parlophone
Chart Positions
UK No.3 US No.7

Playing up to their reputation as the pop scene's masters of detachment, *Actually*'s album cover saw a typically stone-faced Lowe sitting side-by-side with Tennant failing miserably to stifle a yawn. Of course, there was nothing about the material itself to inspire such a display of boredom. This is a record, after all, which takes multiple pot shots at the Tory government (see *Shopping*, *King's Cross*), single-handedly revived the career of a blue-eyed soul legend, and if Tennant is to be believed, even samples the voice of Luciano Pavarotti.

The Italian tenor's vocals can apparently be heard (presumably buried way down in the mix) on *Heart*, the album's second synth-pop masterclass to top the charts, and one written with Madonna in mind. The fact that the Material Girl would no doubt have snapped it up is a testament to how effortlessly PSB had made their way into the pop elite.

Although sales would suggest otherwise (it only reached No.25 in the US), *Actually* feels like Pet Shop Boys' true blockbuster record. It's home to three-week No.1 *It's A Sin*, the brilliantly bombastic admission of Catholic guilt whose suitably monastic video kickstarted the pair's symbiotic partnership with auteur Derek Jarman. It also boasts one of their most memorable, and quietly cutting, lines ("I love you, you pay my rent"), with *Rent* one of several further tracks taken from their abandoned Orlando sessions given a spit and polish. And it also includes one of the all-time great pop duets, *What Have I Done To Deserve This?*, the bittersweet love story of a "major capitalist" and "pathetic feeble wreck" that brought the inimitable 60s diva Dusty Springfield back from the musical wilderness.

> "ALTHOUGH SALES SUGGEST OTHERWISE, *ACTUALLY* FEELS LIKE PET SHOP BOYS' TRUE BLOCKBUSTER RECORD"

Such was PSBs' dominance that they were given their own feature film, although a surreal seaside travelogue that starred Barbara Windsor didn't exactly pull in *Bohemian Rhapsody*-style numbers. Luckily, *It Couldn't Happen Here*'s title track is far less confounding, a heartfelt eulogy to an AIDS victim friend served perfectly by Angelo Badalamenti's strings. The difficult second album syndrome that Lowe admitted to fretting over had been well and truly swerved.

ACTUALLY
Released 1987
Label Parlophone
Chart Positions
UK No.2 US No.25

Lowe, in particular, has often been dismissive of Pet Shop Boys' fourth LP, acknowledging that it sounded completely out of step with the acid house movement ushered in at the turn of the decade, and, thanks to its chart underperformance, joking that it should have been written off as a tax loss. Yet for many, *Behaviour* remains PSB's magnum opus.

It's true that the duo's collaboration with analogue aficionado Harold *'Axel F'* Faltermeyer is more suited to the title of introspective than its predecessor. The synths are warmer, the beats softer and the lyrics often achingly sadder, most notably on *Being Boring*, a beautifully wistful tribute to a childhood friend Tennant lost to AIDS, that became an unlikely favourite of both George Michael and Axl Rose. Despite the relatively lowly UK chart peak of No.20, it's widely regarded as a career-best single, no mean feat from a band with 44 Top 40 hits to their name. The lovestruck balladry of *Nervously* and late-night post-disco feel of *To Face The Truth* also found the pop maximalists realising that sometimes less is more.

While there's little to get the ravers throwing shapes, *Behaviour* still has plenty of dancefloor moments: the Moroder-esque electro of infidelity tale *So Hard*, for example, or *How Can You Expect To Be Taken Seriously?*, a typically witty riposte to pop's do-gooders, which took its cues from the burgeoning scene known as New Jack Swing. Meanwhile, *My October Symphony*, a melting pot of Soviet politics, Italo house piano and chamber strings which spearheaded the duo's long-running affiliation with Tennant's Electronic bandmate Johnny Marr, demonstrated that they still knew how to throw in everything but the kitchen sink.

> "WHILE THERE'S LITTLE TO GET THE RAVERS THROWING SHAPES, *BEHAVIOUR* STILL HAS PLENTY OF DANCEFLOOR MOMENTS"

Elsewhere, *This Must Be The Place I Waited Years To Leave* is another compelling admission of Catholic guilt, this time set to a gothic backdrop no doubt inspired by their love of Depeche Mode's *Violator*. And although PSB failed to get first-choice Ennio Morricone to orchestrate, the *Othello*-quoting closer *Jealousy* is still a sumptuous slice of symphonic pop in which Neil Tennant channels his inner old-school crooner.

Behaviour wasn't always the Pet Shop Boys we knew and loved, but it was arguably the duo at the peak of their powers.

BEHAVIOUR
Released 1990
Label Parlophone
Chart Positions
UK No.2 US No.45

Perhaps keen to prove they hadn't abandoned the club scene that informed their earlier work, Pet Shop Boys' third album was a curious collection of 12" mixes aimed squarely at the dancefloor, a creative move that Tennant later acknowledged alienated some of their casual fanbase. And yet the majority of its rather lean six offerings are now widely accepted as the definitive versions.

None more so than opener *Left To My Own Devices*. Allowing producer Trevor Horn to fully exhibit his art of noise, the sprawling eight-minute cut segues from string-soaked opera to throbbing electro-pop and back again, aligning with the lyric, "But in the back of my head I heard distant feet/ Che Guevara and Debussy to a disco beat."

Elsewhere, their final US Top 20 hit *Domino Dancing* tapped into the burgeoning freestyle movement that largely bypassed Britain but conquered the States. Mashed up with the acid house of *In My House*, their Christmas No.1 *Always On My Mind* strays even further from the Elvis version, while the pair make Sterling Void's positivity anthem *It's Alright* their own with an extra politicised verse. A revisit of *I'm Not Scared*, the Europop hit they penned for Eighth Wonder, lacks the coquettish charms of the original. But otherwise, this is that rare remix album, which hangs together from start to finish.

INTROSPECTIVE
Released 1988
Label Parlophone
Chart Positions
UK No.2 US No.34

Just like the West End production it was designed to showcase (*Closer To Heaven*), Pet Shop Boys' seventh LP drew a mixed response, some applauding its musical ambition and others arguing it was a sign of creative floundering: see the scathing *Pitchfork* review that dismissed it as a "mush of half-arsed trance, lyrics worthy of a late-middle-aged romance authoress and misguided R&B."

The truth is probably somewhere in-between. At times, the pair appear to be replicating former glories, and not just their own. The brash disco throwback *New York City Boy* is a shameless rehash of *Go West*, while *Boy Strange* and opener *For Your Own Good* borrow from David Bowie's *Space Oddity* and Faithless' *God Is A DJ* respectively, the latter more forgivably due to the presence of producer Rollo.

However, *I Don't Know What You Want But I Can't Give It Any More* is a beautifully forlorn account of infidelity that echoes Everything But The Girl's detour into downtempo electronica. Equally wordy single *You Only Tell Me You Love Me When You're Drunk* fuses Tennant's summations of a toxic romance with a plaintive melody that could have wandered over from Nashville. And the 'father/daughter' duet *In Denial*, their second collaboration with Kylie in her indie phase, further showed that *Nightlife* works better when it soundtracks the afterparty rather than the party.

NIGHTLIFE
Released 1999
Label Parlophone
Chart Positions
UK No.7 SWE No.4

After closing the first chapter of their career with 1991 retrospective *Discography*, Pet Shop Boys opened up their second with a pure pop statement of intent. It's little wonder that on hearing *Very* for the first time, EMI bosses reportedly breathed a sigh of relief. Perhaps burned by the muted reaction towards *Behaviour*, Lowe and Tennant had imbued its follow-up with a vibrancy that was almost impossible to resist.

Indeed, having previously been denied the top spot by Michael Jackson's *Bad*, U2's *Rattle And Hum* and Paul Simon's *The Rhythm Of The Saints*, the duo finally scored their first, and surprisingly only, UK No.1 album to date. They very nearly added to their tally of chart-topping singles, thanks to *Go West*, an affectionate Village People cover whose gloriously OTT synths and Cossack choir chants impressively managed to outcamp the original.

There were plenty of other obvious hits where that came from, too. First taster *Can You Forgive Her?*, a caustic relationship tale concerning a closeted man boasting yet another classic PSB couplet ("She's made you some kind of laughing stock/ Because you dance to disco and you don't like rock"), immediately confirmed the pair were back to their bombastic best.

"THERE WERE PLENTY OF OBVIOUS HITS THAT IMMEDIATELY CONFIRMED THE PAIR WERE BACK TO THEIR BEST"

At the other end of the lyrical spectrum, *I Wouldn't Normally Do This Kind Of Thing* established once again that Tennant could write about love without shooting multiple daggers. Meanwhile, *A Different Point Of View* and the brilliantly-titled *Yesterday, When I Was Mad* allowed Lowe the opportunity to fully embrace the rave scene that had previously passed them by, if in typically self-deprecating fashion ("And someone said, 'It's fabulous you're still around today/ You've both made such a little go a very long way'").

The swoonsome slow dance of *Liberation*, *The Theatre*'s orchestral breakbeat and gorgeously melancholic *To Speak Is A Sin* cleverly gave the record some breathing space away from the club. But as exemplified by its promos – a series of CGI-fests in which Lowe and Tennant sport various garish costumes and elaborate headwear – *Very* is very much a record largely designed to be turned up to 11.

VERY
Released 1993
Label Parlophone
Chart Positions
UK No.1 US No.20

Forget the Latin pop explosion of 1999. Three years earlier, Pet Shop Boys had transported the British public to warmer climes with a record steeped in the sounds of South America, a continent they'd travelled across during their previous world tour. *It Always Comes As A Surprise*, for example, is an understated slice of bossa nova that samples two of the genre's masters, Stan Getz and Astrud Gilberto. The flamenco-tinged dance-pop of opener *Discoteca* segues effortlessly into the bilingual (well, if "Un momento, por favor" counts as bilingual) samba of *Single*. And accompanied by a monochrome, yet still resolutely summery video, the percussive *Se A Vida É (That's The Way Life Is)* is essentially the 90s answer to the Lambada.

Featuring the production talents of Grammy-nominated DJ Danny Tenaglia and remix maestros K-Klass, *Bilingual*'s sunny disposition may well have stemmed from a sense of freedom: it was the first record made by the duo since Tennant officially came out to *Attitude* in 1994, something that he alludes to on the brassy diva-assisted house of *Metamorphosis* ("What I wanted to be was a family man/ But nature had some alternative plans").

"PET SHOP BOYS TRANSPORTED THE BRITISH PUBLIC TO WARMER CLIMES WITH A RECORD STEEPED IN SOUTH AMERICA"

Sadly, Neil's announcement appeared to pigeonhole the duo on the other side of the pond. After signing to Atlantic Records in the States, Pet Shop Boys were assigned to the label's Gay Marketing Division and never bothered the US Top 20 again.

And while there was no such marginalisation back home, the fact that *A Red Letter Day* suffered the biggest ever drop out of the Top 10 (9-42) suggested they were in danger of becoming a fanbase-only act here, too.

Bilingual may have fared better in the UK at least had it led with something other than *Before*, a perfectly adequate venture into smooth house featuring club legend Barbara Tucker, but not one that particularly screamed 'first single.' And fabulous though it is, the flamboyant disco-pop of closer *Saturday Night Forever* suggests the duo simply abandoned the album's concept during its final stages. However, its previous 11 offerings result in one of PSB's most cohesive, and underrated, studio efforts.

BILINGUAL
Released 1996
Label Parlophone
Chart Positions
UK No.4 US No.39

N*ightlife* was practically an unequivocal fan favourite compared to Pet Shop Boys' eighth LP, by far the biggest outlier in their extensive back catalogue. As the seven appearances for Johnny Marr would suggest, *Release* saw the Pets largely abandon their signature synth-pop sound in favour of – perish the thought – guitars!

Thankfully, Tennant and Lowe hadn't gone completely over to the dark side. Their second entirely self-produced effort is more at the campfire singalong end of the spectrum than the devil horns, axe-wielding side, with The Beatles appearing to be a particularly strong influence. The first but certainly not the last time they'd address New Labour, *I Get Along* is a *Hey Jude*-esque ditty that takes a satirical swipe at the tempestuous relationship between Peter Mandelson and Tony Blair. And *Birthday Boy*, inspired by a newspaper headline about then-football wunderkind Michael Owen of all people, lifts its six-string solo from John Lennon's *Happy Xmas (War Is Over)*.

But fans were still a little perturbed, which explains why *Release* became the first album that failed to spawn a UK Top 10 hit. Of course, the duo didn't exactly ease everyone into this new stripped-back phase. *Home And Dry*'s baffling promo eschewed the elaborate visual feasts the Pets became renowned for and instead fixated on a bunch of London tube station mice for four long minutes. Already facing an uphill battle to get played, the primitive clip – directed by Turner Prize winner Wolfgang Tillmans, would you believe – essentially hammered a nail in the pair's MTV career.

> "*RELEASE* SAW THE PETS LARGELY ABANDON SYNTH-POP IN FAVOUR OF – PERISH THE THOUGHT – GUITARS!"

Release did keep a few toes in electronic territory, whether the wistful glitch pop of *The Samurai In Autumn* or the Visage-ish *Here*. And *The Night I Fell In Love* skewers Eminem while subverting his monster hit *Stan*, cleverly repositioning the crazed fan and his idol as lovers ("Next morning we woke/ He couldn't have been a nicer bloke"). Far from a disaster then. But a good six years on from Cool Britannia's peak and PSB's sudden discovery of nostalgic guitar pop made them look far behind the curve.

RELEASE
Released 2002
Label Parlophone
Chart Positions
UK No.7 GER No.3

Pet Shop Boys may have given *The Loving Kind* to Girls Aloud (and bizarrely relegated Philip Oakey collaboration *This Used To Be The Future* to bonus track status), but they still kept 11 of their recordings with innovative hit factory Xenomania for their last album to bother the singles chart.

Yes produced two UK Top 40 hits, and indeed two Billboard Dance chart-toppers, thanks to *Love Etc.*, which intersperses buoyant terrace chants with withering put-downs against the uber-materialistic ("You need more than Gerhard Richter hangin' on your wall"), and the contrastingly sweet *Did You See Me Coming?* In the year PSB were awarded the Outstanding Contribution to Music at the BRITs, with long-time fans Brandon Flowers and Lady Gaga in tow, their 10th studio LP was a welcome reminder that the duo weren't ready to be put out to pasture just yet.

While Xenomania were renowned for their cut-and-shut approach to pop, their girl group work often sounding like they'd plucked the best parts from about a half-dozen songs, Tennant and Lowe appear to have reined them in a little here. Only closer *Legacy* goes into unexpected places, segueing from sumptuous strings, horns and timpani arranged by Arcade Fire regular Owen Pallett to anxious Gallic waltz, while namechecking everything from Carphone Warehouse to the Firth of Forth. But that doesn't mean *Yes* is guilty of sameness.

Also orchestrated by Pallett, *Beautiful People* sees the pair take a rare journey back to yesteryear, namely Phil Spector's Wall of Sound, while taking aim at modern celebrity culture. *King Of Rome* harks back to when Massive Attack were the coffee table soundtrack of choice, albeit with one of Tennant's dodgiest rhymes ("I couldn't be more lonely.../ Someday you'll deign to phone me"), while *All Over The World* continues Lowe's habit of incorporating parts of classical favourites into unlikely places: that's the *Nutcracker Suite* you can hear amid all the acidic squelches and electro-funk beats.

> "THEIR 10TH STUDIO LP WAS A REMINDER THAT THE DUO WEREN'T READY TO BE PUT OUT TO PASTURE JUST YET"

As New Order and Franz Ferdinand found out, the Xenomania way of working isn't for everyone. But this back-to-basics affair, for the most part free of the politics that dominated its predecessor, lived up to its title's positivity.

YES
Released 2009
Label Parlophone
Chart Positions
UK No.4 US No.32

Just like *Discography*, Pet Shop Boys' second hits collection *PopArt* appeared to renew the duo's love of the dancefloor. There's certainly nothing back-to-basics about *Fundamental*, a full-blown reunion with one of pop's most celebrated maximalists, Trevor Horn, which also doubles up as a political manifesto.

While Tennant and Lowe had both been rubbing shoulders with the New Labour elite on that historic election night in 1997, their allegiances nine years on had soured. The pair take aim at everything from Blair's special relationship with George W. Bush (*I'm With Stupid*) and the Iraq War (*Twentieth Century*) to the Government's handling of immigration (*Indefinite Leave To Remain*) and the Identity Cards Act (*Integral*).

It's something of a shock to hear Tennant, not exactly blessed with the most expressive of voices, sound positively indignant on the latter as he parrots opposing lines like "We're concerned, you're a threat/ You're not integral to the project."

But even the most right-leaning PSB fan could appreciate *Casanova In Hell*, a sardonic reimagining of the titular lothario as an impotent laughing stock, and *Minimal*, a mix of Speak & Spell robotics, surging synths and Peter Hook-inspired basslines that could be their finest single this side of the millennium. Conversely, *Numb*, a listless Broadway-style ballad hitmaker Diane Warren must have penned on an off-day, may be their worst.

FUNDAMENTAL
Released 2006
Label Parlophone
Chart Positions
UK No.5 GER No.4

"Electric, but more of the same" was how Pet Shop Boys teased their 13th LP, no doubt much to their label's discontent. You could argue that the pair were selling themselves short. Sure, *Super* is another assault on the dancefloor produced by Stuart Price and lead single *The Pop Kids*, a handbag house throwback advocating the joys of the night out, is essentially *Vocal* Part II. But with thumping Berghain-friendly trance (*Inner Sanctum*), honky tonk techno (*Happiness*) and dreamy breakbeat (*Into Thin Air*), it had plenty new to offer.

Despite the inclusion of the near-wordless *Pazzo!*, *Super* is much more of a storyteller, too. *Twenty-something*, a curious fusion of reggaeton and the English Riviera pop of Metronomy, is *Opportunities (Let's Make Lots Of Money)* for the generation who've grown up on *The Apprentice* ("Thirty's calling/ Round the bend/ Will your ideas/ Ever trend?")

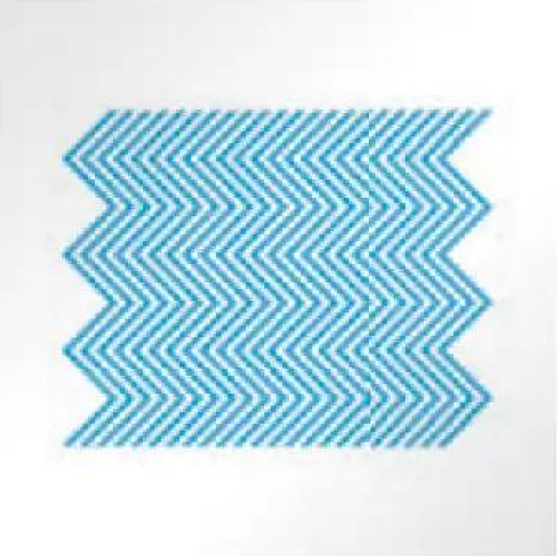
Sad Robot World is a 'does what it says on the tin' electro-ballad that manages to make you feel sorry for a bunch of overworked androids. While the mournful *The Dictator Decides* imagines a self-hating, self-aware tyrant pleading for the sweet relief of execution against pulsing synths, mournful operatic wailing and marching beats. *Super* might be pushing it a bit, but arriving 30 years after their debut, this companion piece is undoubtedly smart, stylish and solid.

SUPER
Released 2016
Label x2
Chart Positions
UK No.3 GER No.3

Pet Shop Boys appeared to take another leftfield turn for their 11th studio album on appointing co-producer Andrew Dawson, a man whose CV includes three albums with Kanye West. But unless you count the deadpan spoken word on *Ego Music*, a hilarious skewering of pretentious celebs perhaps inspired by the ex-Mr. Kardashian ("I see myself as a building/ My mind is the office where the work gets done"), there's little to connect the dots.

Indeed, the fact *Elysium* was originally titled 'Happy Sad' gives you some inkling about its prevailing bittersweet mood. *Leaving* and closer *Requiem In Denim And Leopardskin* both sound tailor-made for Ibizan sunsets, but the former sees Tennant reflect on the parallels between death and heartbreak, while the latter is a poignant send-off for the pair's late make-up artist Lynne Easton. Even Olympics anthem *Winner*, released shortly before they took their rightful place at London 2012's closing ceremony, seems more suited to consolation prize than gold medal. A surprise spiritual sequel to 1990's *Behaviour*, then, even if it never quite reaches the same heights.

ELYSIUM
Released 2012
Label
Parlophone
Chart Positions
UK No.9
US No.44



An album of many milestones, *Electric* was the first released through Pet Shop Boys' x2 label, the start of a fruitful working relationship with Stuart Price and their highest-charting entry at home (No.3) and Stateside (No.26) since 1993's *Very*.

It's easy to see why those who jumped ship with *Elysium*'s introspection climbed back aboard. You only need look at the promo shot in which Lowe's head is fully encased in a mirrorball to recognise that this time the pair meant disco business.

Having masterminded similar high-energy comebacks for fellow *Classic Pop* favourites Madonna, Kylie and Seal, Price was perfect for the job.

Lead single *Axis*, a commanding slice of electro-house where a vocodered Tennant chants "Electric energy," is the most fired-up PSB have sounded outside remix circles. *The Last To Die* repurposes Bruce Springsteen's anti-war protest into a celebratory paean to gay culture, while *Love Is A Bourgeois Construct* proved they could still embrace the highbrow while also throwing some shapes. "This is my kind of music," Tennant sings on *Vocal*, a hands-in-the-air banger Calvin Harris could drop at a Vegas superclub without anyone batting an eyelid. It's also ours, too.

ELECTRIC
Released 2013
Label x2
Chart Positions
UK No.3
US No.26

Pet Shop Boys' third consecutive collaboration with Stuart Price, *Hotspot* was largely recorded at the same Hansa Studios that shaped another threesome, Bowie's Berlin trilogy. And the pair seemed enamoured by their German sojourn. The pounding electro of opening number *Will-O-The-Wisp* not only sets its meet-cute aboard the U-Bahn, but samples noise from the famous party line, too. *You Are The One* may well be the only love song to namecheck the affluent neighbourhood of Zehlendorf. And then there are elements of Kraftwerk (the call and response nu-disco of *Monkey Business*) and early Romantic composer Mendelssohn (the truly bizarre *Wedding March*-goes-EDM of closer *Wedding In Berlin*).

"HOTSPOT WAS LARGELY RECORDED AT HANSA STUDIOS AND THE PAIR SEEMED ENAMOURED BY THEIR GERMAN SOJOURN"

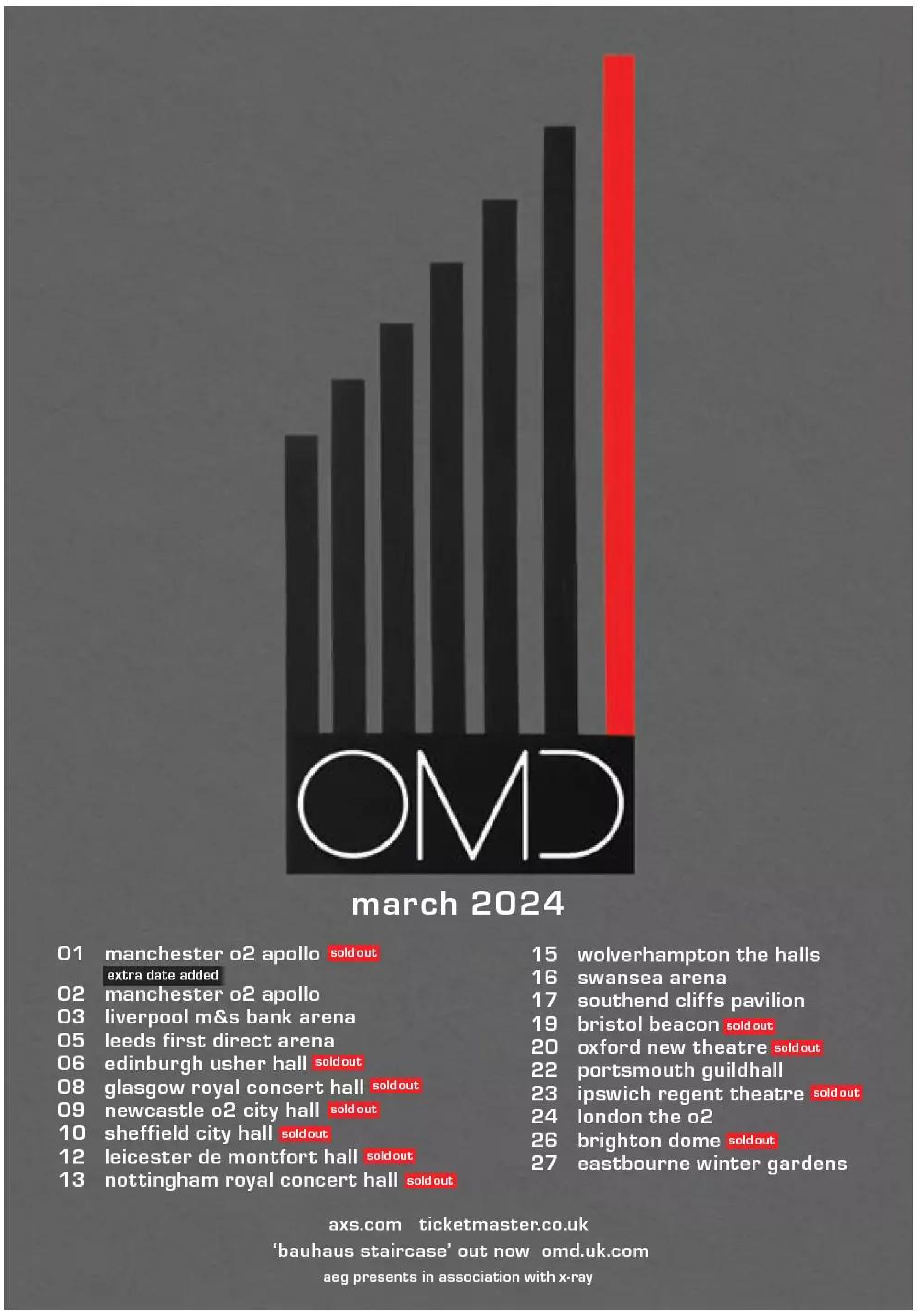
However, the pair don't entirely forget their roots. Foreshadowing both their *Lost* EP and Years & Years' poignant *It's A Sin* cover, Olly Alexander duet *Dreamland* is a thinly veiled attack against Brexit that suggests the duo are happy to pass on the queer synth-pop mantle to their most obvious successors. *Hoping For A Miracle* adds to their canon of anti-Blair songs, reflecting here on the former PM's reputation in the wake of the Iraq War ("When nobody loves you/ Nobody needs you/ You're out here on your own").

And slightly contradicting Tennant's tongue-in-cheek claim that "all acoustic guitars should be banned," *Burning The Heather* ropes in longtime admirer Bernard Butler for the stripped-back tale of a lonely troubadour which could have neatly fitted onto *Release*.

Elsewhere, *Only The Dark* is a gleaming *Behaviour*-esque synth-pop affair about a night of passion, which is perhaps the closest PSB have come to a bedroom jam ("It's time to make a fire/ Play some music low/ I'm right here next to you/ With nowhere else to go"). *I Don't Wanna* brilliantly subverts the party anthem, with Neil expertly playing the sulky introverted teen who'd rather sit at home alone on a Friday night than go clubbing. While *Happy People* is the kind of euphoric vintage house that eventually persuades him to put his dancing shoes on.

On this evidence, a fourth studio effort with Price would be more than welcome.

HOTSPOT
Released 2020
Label x2
Chart Positions
UK No.3 GER No.3


OMD
march 2024
01 manchester o2 apollo sold out
extra date added
02 manchester o2 apollo
03 liverpool m&s bank arena
05 leeds first direct arena
06 edinburgh usher hall sold out
08 glasgow royal concert hall sold out
09 newcastle o2 city hall sold out
10 sheffield city hall sold out
12 leicester de montfort hall sold out
13 nottingham royal concert hall sold out
15 wolverhampton the halls
16 swansea arena
17 southend cliffs pavilion
19 bristol beacon sold out
20 oxford new theatre sold out
22 portsmouth guildhall
23 ipswich regent theatre sold out
24 london the o2
26 brighton dome sold out
27 eastbourne winter gardens
axs.com ticketmaster.co.uk
'bauhaus staircase' out now omd.uk.com
aeg presents in association with x-ray

DREAMWORLD
PET SHOP BOYS
THE GREATEST HITS LIVE
JUNE 2024
4 GLASGOW OVO HYDRO
6 NOTTINGHAM MOTORPOINT ARENA
8 BIRMINGHAM UTILITA ARENA
9 MANCHESTER CO-OP LIVE
11 BELFAST SSE ARENA
★★★★★
THE TIMES
THE GUARDIAN
DAILY TELEGRAPH
METRO
NME
PETSHOPBOYS.CO.UK | AEGPRESENTS.CO.UK | AXS.COM | TICKETMASTER.CO.UK
AEG PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH PRIMARY TALENT INTERNATIONAL

elbow
UK TOUR – MAY 2024
PLUS SPECIAL GUESTS
The WAEVE
MAY 7
BRIGHTON CENTRE
MAY 9
LONDON THE O2
MAY 10
BIRMINGHAM RESORTS WORLD ARENA
MAY 11
GLASGOW OVO HYDRO
MAY 12
LEEDS FIRST DIRECT ARENA
MAY 14
MANCHESTER CO-OP LIVE
MAY 15
NOTTINGHAM MOTORPOINT ARENA
ELBOW.CO.UK | AEGPRESENTS.CO.UK | AXS.COM | TICKETMASTER.CO.UK | SEETICKETS.COM
AEG PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH X-RAY

JOHNNY MARR
THE SPIRIT POWER TOUR
WITH SUPPORT FROM GAZ COOMBES
APRIL 2 '24
O2 CITY HALL NEWCASTLE
APRIL 3 24'
BARROWLANDS GLASGOW
APRIL 5 24'
O2 ACADEMY LEEDS
APRIL 6 24'
OLYMPIA LIVERPOOL
APRIL 7 24'
THE HALLS WOLVERHAMPTON
APRIL 9 24'
GREAT HALL CARDIFF
APRIL 10 24'
O2 ACADEMY BRISTOL
APRIL 12 '24
EVENTIM APOLLO LONDON
APRIL 13 '24
DOME BRIGHTON
APRIL 14 '24
ROCK CITY NOTTINGHAM
AEGPRESENTS.CO.UK | AXS.COM | TICKETMASTER.CO.UK
AEG PRESENTS AND DF CONCERTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH WME

2024

The year ahead

THINGS ARE SHAPING UP NICELY FOR 12 MONTHS OF MAJOR NEW ALBUMS AND TOURS FROM OUR FAVOURITE ARTISTS

MARK LINDORES

© Getty

It's that time again when we cast our eye, and our ears, back over the past 12 months and wonder how those fabled new albums that we predict every year – yes, we're talking to you Janet Jackson, The Cure, Sade, Kate Bush – have *STILL* not materialised. And who'd have predicted we'd get new Beatles material, though, before Rihanna…

Still, it's better to focus on what we have rather than what we don't, and 2023 has given us plenty of fantastic new music from Depeche Mode, Kylie, OMD and Take That among others and we look forward to experiencing them in a live setting in the new year. Other big live draws in 2024 include the reunited Girls Aloud (see our news story on pages 10-11), Liam Gallagher, who is performing Oasis' *Definitely Maybe* in full, Bruce Springsteen, thankfully fully recovered from his health scare, and The Pretenders.

For those unable to get to gigs for whatever reason, the concert film is a pretty decent substitute. Although nothing can replicate the magic of live music, this is something we expect to see a lot more of, with trailblazers Taylor Swift and Beyoncé embracing the format and having their tours in cinemas, alongside a reissue of Talking Heads' seminal 1984 film, *Stop Making Sense*. Speaking of which, the fact that film managed to get David Byrne and his bandmates back together after decades of acrimony is proof that we never really know what to expect.

© Getty

DUA LIPA

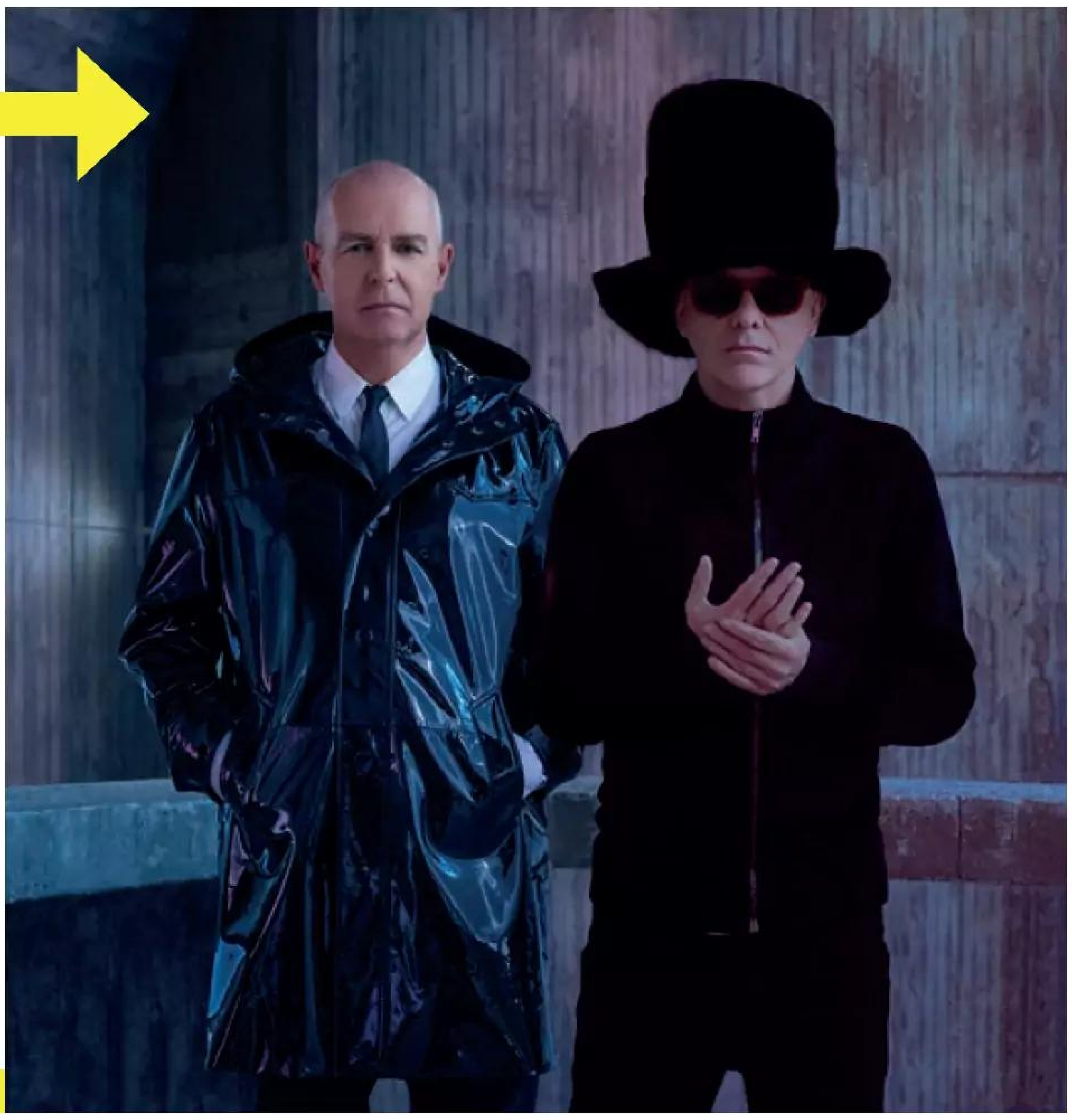
With her latest single *Houdini* proving that *Future Nostalgia* was no fluke, anticipation is high for the release of Dua's third studio album. Although she has been vague as to how the record will sound, offering up titbits such as being influenced by psychedelia, she has shared glimpses behind the scenes on her social media accounts confirming the involvement of Tame Impala's Kevin Parker and working once more with producer Koz (as well as writer Sarah Hudson, the team behind hits such as *Levitating* and *Physical*). Lipa will also be hitting the road again in support of the album, with a Glastonbury headlining performance looking highly likely.

Pet Shop Boys

With pop's dynamic duo already confirmed for a headline slot at the Isle Of Wight Festival, we're almost certain to have the new Pet Shop Boys album early in the new year.

Having completed their trilogy with Stuart Price, the pair have been working on the LP with producer James Ford for more than a year. Also announced, is a documentary on the album's creation along with the *Dreamworld Tour* for the BBC's flagship arts series, *Imagine*.

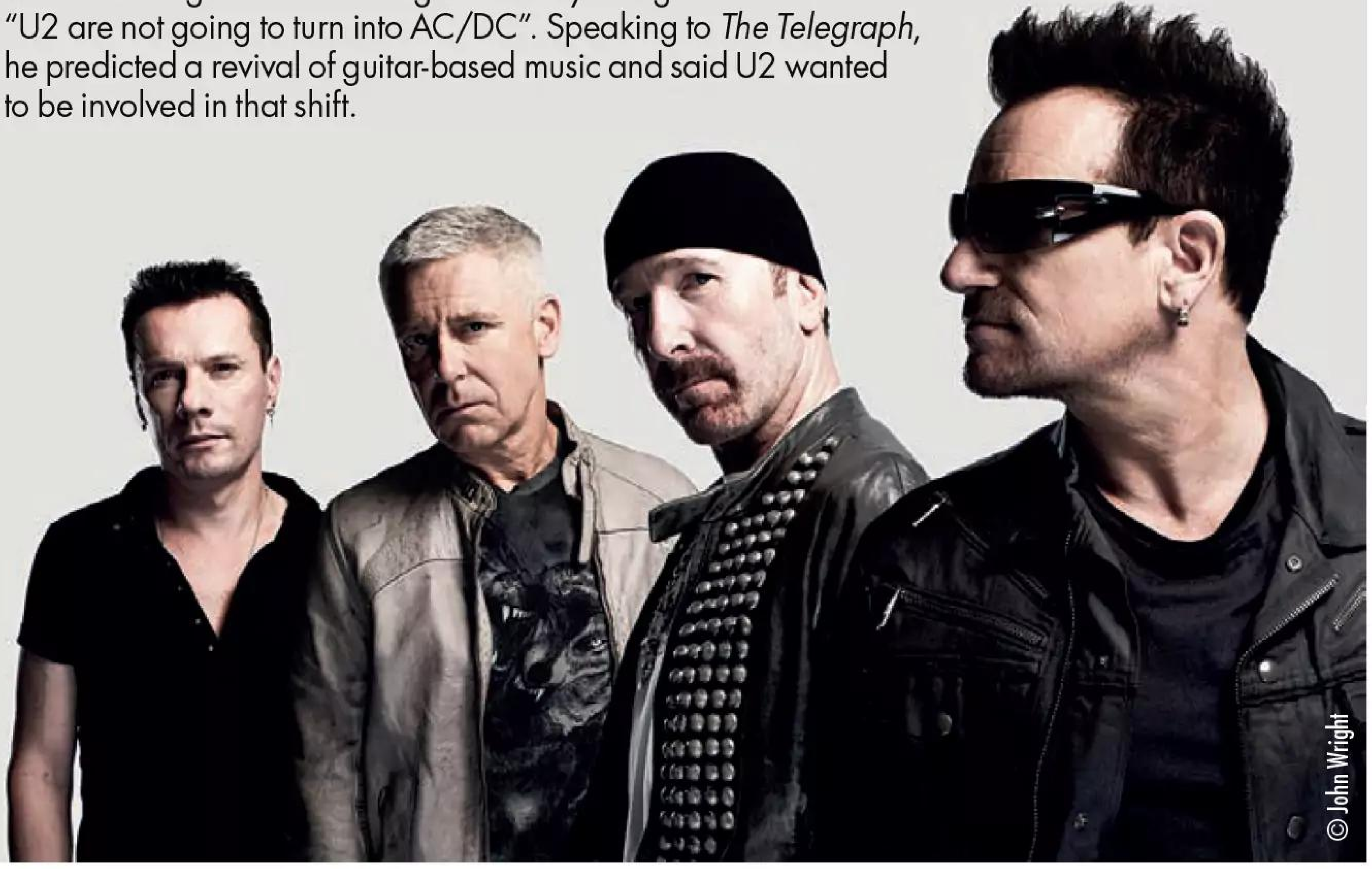
Alan Yentob has been granted access to recording sessions and tour rehearsals with Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe – as well as collaborators and friends – talking extensively about the new record and PSB's 40-year career. The BBC have announced that the documentary will be broadcast in the spring – the strongest indicator yet when we can expect the album.



U2

U2's shows at the state-of-the-art Sphere venue in Las Vegas have set a new standard in live music presentation and the implementation of technology thanks to its immersive use of video. The run has proved so successful that it has already been extended, biting into time that the group had allocated to work on their new album.

Bono and co. have been in the studio with producers Steve Lillywhite and Jacknife Lee, with recent single *Atomic City* a taster of what fans can expect from the record, which The Edge described as guitar-heavy though clarified that "U2 are not going to turn into AC/DC". Speaking to *The Telegraph*, he predicted a revival of guitar-based music and said U2 wanted to be involved in that shift.



© John Wright

LENNY KRAVITZ

After redefining what a man approaching his 60th birthday should look like in his *TK421* video, which went viral recently thanks to the buff singer parading around his house naked, the buzz certainly worked in attracting attention to the announcement of Lenny Kravitz's new album *Blue Electric Light*, which is released on 15 March. Recorded over the past three years in the Bahamas, Kravitz has written and produced the album himself as well as playing most of the instruments in between his obvious workouts.

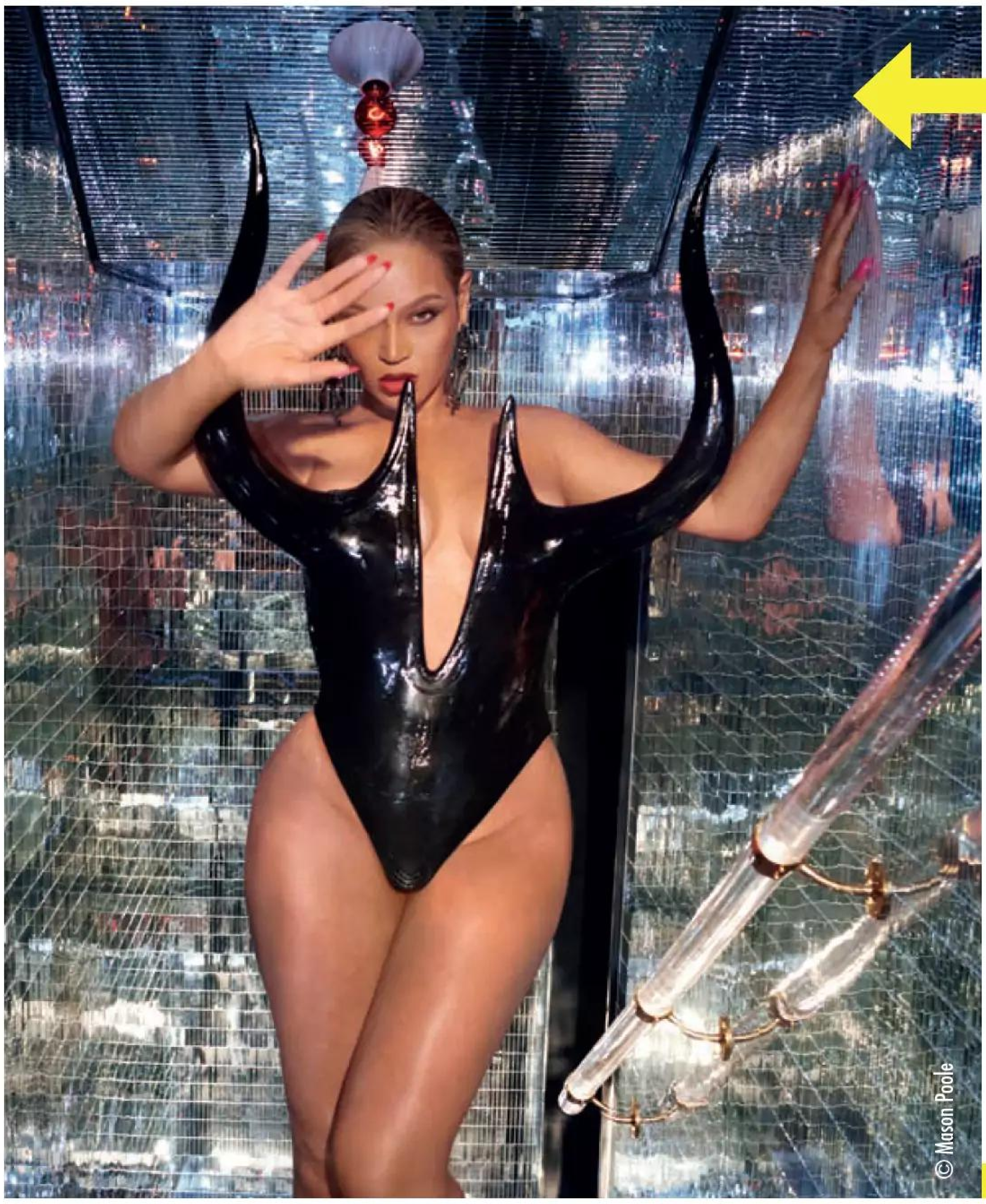
© Getty

TALKING HEADS

One of the most unexpected and exciting occurrences of 2023 was seeing all four original members of Talking Heads back together to promote the re-release of their 1984 tour film *Stop Making Sense*.

Their notoriously acrimonious split, which saw them estranged for decades made it highly unlikely they'd ever work together again, but reuniting to remaster and promote the film has led to the building of bridges. When US talk show host Stephen Colbert asked the band about the likelihood of a tour, the foursome stopped short of committing to that, but Chris Frantz did confirm they'd be working together to "protect the legacy of the band". Whether that is overseeing their discography for reissues, new material or live shows, the exact details are unknown, but anything is very welcome at this point – the Heads are Talking...

© Getty



© Mason Poole

Beyoncé

After bringing Act 1 of her dance opus *Renaissance* to a close with her new tour film, Beyoncé is said to be unleashing Act 2 for 2024. Ever since she announced the *Renaissance* concept would be a trilogy; fans have speculated that the second and third acts would be country and rock albums. The biggest indication yet that this is true came from a recent *Vogue* interview with Es Devlin, the artist who designed Beyoncé's tour stage. "Beyoncé was interested in country," Devlin said. "I think she had had a really bad experience at a country music award show, and she wanted to research its African-American roots. She discovered that 50 per cent of cowboys were Black, in the 19th and early 20th century, and country music, of course, has been largely appropriated. She wanted to reappropriate Americana and country music from a Black perspective. She made a series of extraordinary films during lockdown [not] out yet."

© Erik Melvin

Kylie

With Sin City transformed into Min City until next May, Kylie's focus for the first half of next year is firmly on her Vegas residency. However, as she is only performing at weekends and has spoken of feeling inspired to work on new material, her beloved portable recording studio could well wield fresh songs sooner rather than later. Possible new tracks aside, late 2024 should see Kylie finally performing again for the eagerly-anticipated Tension Tour – her first full UK jaunt since 2018. While her Vegas show looks spectacular, her recent An Audience With Kylie special proved a warm welcome awaits her return to the stage on this side of the pond.

JESSIE WARE

Jessie Ware's funky take on disco on *That! Feels! Good!* gave her a Top 3 album and earned a Mercury Music Prize nomination this year. In 2024, Ware is heading back into the studio and has revealed she won't be leaving the dancefloor just yet. "I wanna go a bit harder in the final chapter to these records," she told Australian website The Music. "I'm gonna do a dance record next. It's gonna be harder, maybe a bit of techno... Then I will probably go back to an album like [her debut LP] *Devotion*. It's kind of cyclical. I'm doing my dance thing now, but I don't wanna stray away always from the R&B and soul element."

© Getty

Madonna

After her near-fatal spell in intensive care with a serious bacterial infection, we couldn't have been happier to see Madonna back onstage to kick off her triumphant Celebration Tour in October. We are also looking forward to seeing much more of her in 2024 if rumours that she'll return for a victory lap of stadium shows next summer turn out to be true, which also match up to whether she headlines Glastonbury. Emily Eavis has made no secret of the fact that the pop icon is her dream booking for the festival and was there at the opening night of the tour at London's O2, declaring it "incredible". With Madonna looking back at her career and legacy for the show, which revolves around a biographical arc, a hit-packed set at Worthy Farm would be the perfect way to launch the deluxe editions of her stellar back catalogue. The tour's musical director, producer Stuart Price, recently told the BBC that he'd had access to all of Madonna's original recordings while putting the show together, so 2024 could finally be the year we see those lavish reissues.

SHERYL CROW

Having declared her 2019 album *Threads* in would be her last, Sheryl Crow has had a change of heart and announced that her 12th LP *Evolution*, produced with Mike Elizondo, will be released on 29 March. Inspired by her recent induction into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame and a hefty dose of retrospection for recent documentary *Sheryl*, the rock icon will be releasing a track each month until the album is out next spring. "Everything is more song-oriented now with streaming, and making an album is a huge endeavour," Crow explained in a statement. "I started sending just a couple of demos to Mike, but the songs just kept flowing out of me and it was pretty obvious this was going to be an album."

NELLY FURTADO

© Getty

Admittedly in semi-retirement from music (she focused on motherhood, went to university and worked in her friend's record store for fun), Nelly Furtado was lured back into the spotlight when her daughter told her that her tracks were hugely popular on TikTok. An invitation from Drake to perform with him when he headlined Canada's OVO Fest saw the singer back onstage for the first time in years. Overwhelmed by the response, both at the show and across social media, Furtado took tentative steps back into the public glare.

Since then, the singer has used 2023 as a reintroduction, quietly readying new music for next year. Rather than stage a major comeback, Furtado's return will initially be more low-key, guesting on tracks and releasing singles before launching a body of work. She is also booked for several European festivals for next summer (including a strongly rumoured headline slot at Mighty Hoopla in August). As well as Dom Dolla, she has reunited with Timbaland, producer of her *Loose* album, to create upbeat, fun music typical of that record.

Alison Moyet

Having taken time out from music to study at university, Alison's recent graduation with a degree in Fine Art Printmaking spells good news for fans eagerly anticipating new material. Six years on from the sublime *Other*, Moyet announced she had begun work on her 10th solo album. Posting on Instagram in October, the singer revealed she had been working on the record for a month at that point. Although it is expected to be the third of a planned trilogy with Guy Sigsworth, no further information has been disclosed. The probable release next year will hopefully be accompanied by a tour. Meanwhile, Moyet's debut studio album *Alf* also celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2024.

Coldplay

The hardest working band in the world have somehow found time to write and record a new studio album, *Moon Music*, during their two-year world tour. After first teasing the LP at the beginning of the year, describing it as "the second volume of *Music Of The Spheres*", they confirmed it was almost finished at the beginning of November in an Instagram post inviting fans to be part of a track entitled *One World* by submitting a recording of themselves singing a simple 'Ahhhh'. With their tour schedule currently stretching into next September (with a Glastonbury-sized hole in the already announced dates), the band have hinted at plans to debut new songs in the setlist.

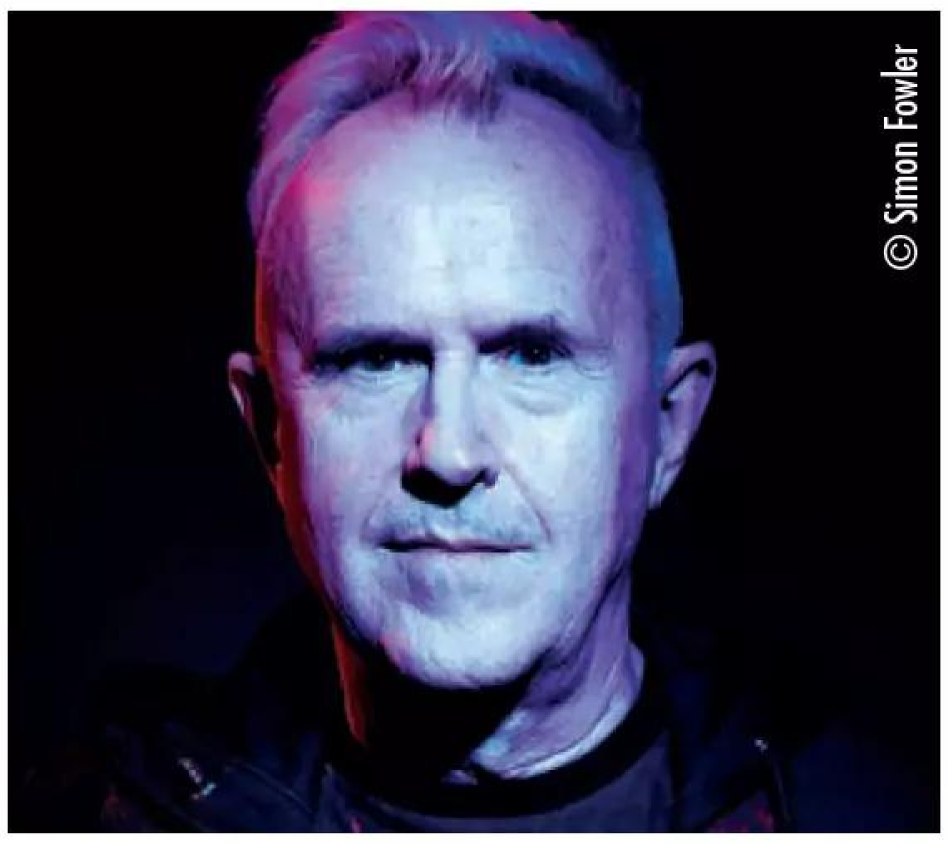
© James Marcus Haney

© Getty

USHER

The R&B superstar has proved a huge draw in Las Vegas with his bulletproof back catalogue and spectacular stage show – and in February the entire world will get to see what the fuss is all about when Usher takes to the biggest stage in the world for the Super Bowl halftime show – an achievement he described as "the honour of a lifetime".

As well as the Super Bowl, 11 February will see the release of Usher's ninth studio album, *Coming Home* and the announcement of a world tour. "Usher is an icon whose music has left an indelible mark on the cultural landscape throughout his career, we couldn't be more excited to have him headline this year's Apple Music Super Bowl Halftime Show," said Seth Dudowsky, the head of music for the NFL, in a statement. "We look forward to working with Usher to bring fans another Halftime Show for the history books."



© Simon Fowler

HOWARD JONES

After a year of retrospection with his *Celebrate It Together: 1983-2023* hits compilation and 40th anniversary tour, Howard Jones is looking forward to 2024 by beginning work on a new album entitled *Global Citizen*.

"I'll get started on it at the beginning of next year," he told *Creative Loafing Tampa Bay*. "But with this next album, I'm thinking about working in a different way, and actually writing lyrics first." Always keen on innovation, Jones also expressed an interest in using an AI version of his vocals as a choir. While artists have voiced their concern at the rise in Artificial Intelligence, Jones compared it to the discourse that surrounded sampling and synthesizers in their early stages and argues it should be embraced if used correctly.

BANANARAMA

2024 may be the year of the girl-group with a new Sugababes LP, a Spice Girls documentary and the Girls Aloud reunion. Meanwhile, pop's original girl gang celebrate four decades in music with two London Palladium shows and 40-track compilation, *Glorious*. Rather than stick to the hits (their original *Greatest Hits* is untouchable), they've chosen singles, album tracks and new songs to tell their story. It's "a celebration of all the twists and turns in our career," says Keren Woodward.

© Danny Clinch

THE KILLERS

After revealing to *The Times* last summer that he felt creatively "in crisis" and had abandoned work on the latest Killers album halfway through, it should come as no surprise that Brandon Flower's attention has instead turned to a solo LP. "The Killers are my identity, and our songs fill the seats, but I'm more fulfilled making music like [2021 album] *Pressure Machine*," he said. "I'm thinking about the next phase of my life." A brand new track, *Spirit*, features on their new greatest hits comp *Rebel Diamonds: The Best Of*, reviewed on page 82.

On The Road

There is little doubt that The Eras Tour finally arriving in the UK will be next year's biggest draw with stadiums playing host to stampedes of Swifties. However, even if you're not a Taylor fan, or you couldn't get through the endless ballots for tickets, 2024 will almost certainly have something in store for you.

Such is the thirst for live music that some of 2023's most successful jaunts are already confirmed to return, including Bruce Springsteen, P!nk and Depeche Mode, who will be kicking off the new year by downsizing from stadiums to arenas for another European leg of their incredible Memento Mori Tour.

Also in arenas at the start of the year will be Rick Astley, who is hitting the road with Belinda Carlisle with what should be a great live show, as should the Manic Street Preachers/Suede double bill. James Blunt is also jumping onto the UK's arena circuit while OMD, The Pretenders, Take That, Alison Goldfrapp and Róisín Murphy have all confirmed major tours, too.

After a disappointing 2023, the summer festivals are upping their game. Isle Of Wight Festival has already landed a major coup with Pet Shop Boys and Green Day confirmed, while the rumours of Glastonbury's headliners change daily. With Madonna, Dua Lipa, Bruce Springsteen, Coldplay, P!nk and Rihanna all in the mix, and Cher favourite for the Legends slot (celebrating the 25th anniversary of her mega-hit *Believe*), the eventual line-up will be very special.

Elsewhere, EMF are touring to promote their new studio album *The Beauty And The Chaos*, while Happy Mondays join forces with Inspiral Carpets for a great baggy double-header. The mighty Matt Johnson also returns with The The for the Ensouled World Tour, that includes four major UK headline dates next September.

As well as appearing at Let's Rock, The Human League are already looking ahead to the end of the year, and rivalling Mariah Carey for their inclination to emerge just in time for Christmas party season, with Phil Oakey and the girls booked into arenas next December. Whatever your taste, 2024 is set to be a lively one.

© Anton Corbijn

PALOMA FAITH

A split from her partner has informed the bulk of Paloma Faith's sixth studio album, *The Glorification Of Sadness*, released on 16 February. Described by Faith as "finding the confidence to walk away from a relationship and being empowered with your own happiness", an exciting roster of guests includes Chase & Status, Maverick Sabre, Lapsley, MJ Cole, Fred Cox, Amy Wadge, Liam Bailey, Jaycen Joshua and Kojey Radical. Faith also heads out on an extensive UK tour, kicking off in Reading on 3 April.

© Dean Stockings

BOY GEORGE

One of the hardest-working men in pop, Boy George has spent 2023 on the road with Culture Club, judging *The Voice Australia*, playing Captain Hook in panto and documenting it all in *Karma*, his third autobiography. In 2024, the singer will be continuing to tour with Culture Club as well as releasing "a bunch of albums" recorded over the past two years. He is also heading to New York to star on Broadway in *Moulin Rouge*, where he will be taking on the role of Zidler.

© Chuck Grant

LANA DEL REY

Ms Del Rey capped a great year that saw the release of her fantastic *Did You Know That There's A Tunnel Under Ocean Blvd* album and a Hyde Park headline show, but she's already started mapping out her next LP. "The music took a huge turn from *Norman [F**king Rockwell]*, and it's been going down that path aggressively," she told *The Hollywood Reporter*. Del Rey has also revealed she's been working on a collection of covers for the past seven years, which could find a release in 2024.

CLASSIC POP TOP TEN

WEEK ENDING 8 JANUARY 1983

NOVELTY CRUISE FODDER, A NUTTY BOYS CLASSIC, PHIL COLLINS GOES RETRO, SHAKY DOES ELVIS, A GREEN DUCK IN A NAPPY AND BING & BOWIE…

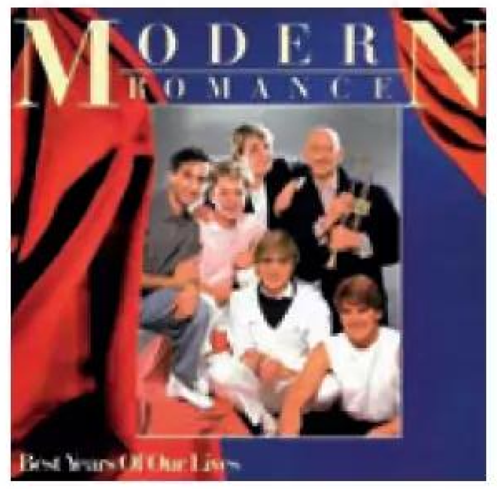
STEVE O'BRIEN

01 (1) **SAVE YOUR LOVE**
RENÉE AND RENATO
(HOLLYWOOD)

02 (6) **YOU CAN'T HURRY LOVE**
PHIL COLLINS
(VIRGIN)

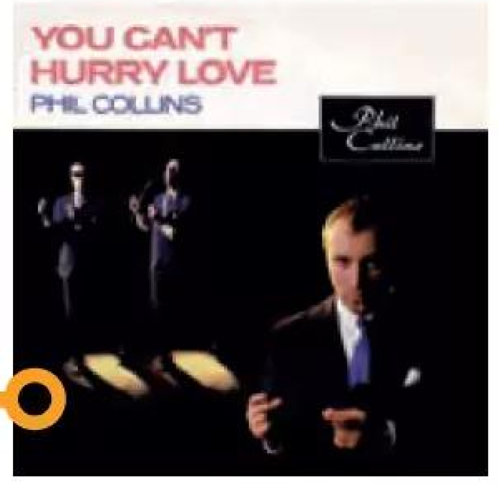
SAVE YOUR LOVE
RENÉE AND RENATO
(HOLLYWOOD)

Italian-born and Birmingham-bred Renato Pagliari had been singing most of his 35 years before he made his telly debut on the ITV talent show *New Faces* in 1975. There, he'd impressed record producer (and creator of *Metal Mickey*, fact fans) Johnny Edward who gifted him with this cruise-boat favourite. Pairing him with British vocalist Hilary Lester the duo were remonickered Renée And Renato, releasing the *Just One Cornetto*-like *Save Your Love* in October 1982. Those watching the video may have been thinking they were seeing the real Renée, except that Lester's place was taken by a model, Val Penny. The song made Christmas No.1, but would prove to be the only hit for the pair. "I think you have to laugh along with it," Lester said in the book *1000 UK #1 Hits*. "I'll never be ashamed of it, but at the end of the day it was a novelty record."



BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES
MODERN ROMANCE
(WEA)

There were few more effervescent party bangers in 1983 than this, Modern Romance's biggest chart hit. While *Best Years Of Our Lives* was never going to win any literary gongs ("Ooh ooh ooh, it makes me wanna dance/ Ooh ooh ooh, it's a new romance," sings Michael J Mullins, like a homegrown Kid Creole), this endearingly dumb number was a guaranteed dancefloor filler at the time, even though its tropical rhythms felt more attuned to summer than the winter it soundtracked. Movie fact: Former Modern Romance member John Du Prez has an alternative career as a film composer, writing the music for such movies as *A Fish Called Wanda* and *Carry On Columbus*.



YOU CAN'T HURRY LOVE
PHIL COLLINS
(VIRGIN)

First waxed by The Supremes in 1966, this Holland-Dozier-Holland banger made the UK Top 3 in its original form. Phil Collins', let's face it, lesser version, would, however, top the charts in the UK, his first as a solo artist. The second 45 from his album, *Hello, I Must Be Going!*, the song was an attempt, Collins revealed to *Hitmen* in 1986, "to see if [producer] Hugh Padgham and I could duplicate that 60s sound. It's very difficult today because most recording facilities are so much more sophisticated than they were back then. It's therefore hard to make the drums sound as rough as they did on the original. That's what we were going after, a remake, not an interpretation, but a remake."

A WINTER'S TALE
DAVID ESSEX
(MERCURY)

Though he's mainly remembered as a giant of 70s pop, let's not forget that David Essex had a fair few hits in the 1980s, too, including this Christmas-flavoured favourite. Penned by Mike Batt (*Remember You're A Womble*) and Tim Rice (*Jesus Christ Superstar*), the song was Essex's first Top 10 placing since 1980's *Silver Dream Machine* and was later included on his 1983 album *The Whisper*. *A Winter's Tale* would spend a total of 10 weeks in the UK chart, peaking at No.2. Essex would enjoy another smasheroo later in 1983 with the notably less Christmassy *Tahiti*.

03 ▲ (7) **A WINTER'S TALE**
DAVID ESSEX
(MERCURY)

04 ▲ (8) **BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES**
MODERN ROMANCE
(WEA)

05 (5) **OUR HOUSE**
MADNESS
(STIFF)

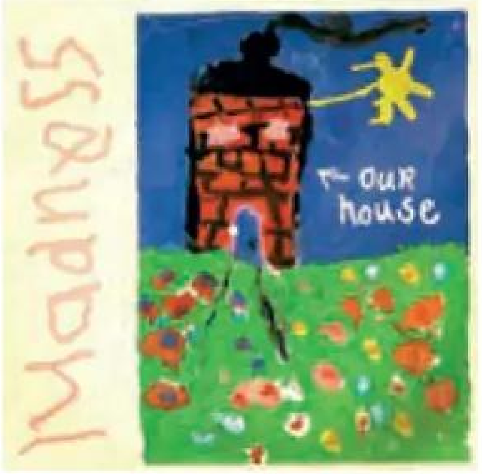
06 ▼ (4) **TIME (CLOCK OF THE HEART)**
CULTURE CLUB
(VIRGIN)

07 ▼ (2) **THE SHAKIN' STEVENS EP**
SHAKIN' STEVENS
(EPIC)

08 ▲ (33) **ORVILLE'S SONG**
KEITH HARRIS AND ORVILLE
(BBC)

09 ▼ (3) **PEACE ON EARTH/LITTLE DRUMMER BOY**
DAVID BOWIE & BING CROSBY
(RCA)

10 ▲ (14) **ALL THE LOVE IN THE WORLD**
DIONNE WARWICK
(ARISTA)



OUR HOUSE
MADNESS
(STIFF)

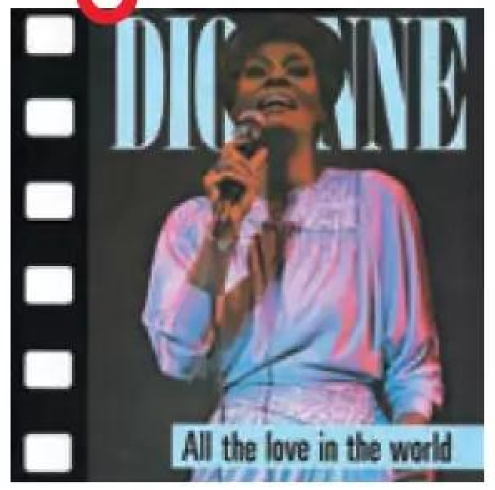
Released as the lead single from Madness' fourth studio album, *The Rise & Fall*, *Our House* won the band a Best Pop Song gong at the 1983 Ivor Novello Awards. A Top 5 hit in the UK, the promo video is one of the Nutty Boys' most memorable, featuring the band playing a working class family straight out of a 60s kitchen sink drama (only with added cross-dressing and ironic air guitar). In the liner notes for the 1986 singles compilation, *Utter Madness*, Chas Smash recalled that the origin for *Our House* lay in his plan that each member would write a song about their family backgrounds, "as all our families were so different. No one else bothered. I did."

THE SHAKIN' STEVENS EP
SHAKIN' STEVENS
(EPIC)

This extended play was released by Shaky as the follow-up to his No.10-charting *I'll Be Satisfied* and was made up of four tracks – *Blue Christmas* and live versions of *Josephine*, *Lawdy Miss Clawdy* and *Que Sera, Sera*. *Blue Christmas* was, of course, a cover of Stevens' hero Elvis' most famous festive number, while *Josephine* was a Shaky original. *Lawdy Miss Clawdy* was a version of the Lloyd Price track first made famous by Fats Domino while *Que Sera, Sera* was a vintage Doris Day singalong originally from the 1956 Alfred Hitchcock thriller *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. All three live tracks were recorded at Southampton's Gaumont Theatre during Stevens' winter tour of 1982.

PEACE ON EARTH/ LITTLE DRUMMER BOY
DAVID BOWIE & BING CROSBY
(RCA)

There are odd couples and there are *odd* couples. Nearly 50 years on from its recording (the song was aired as part of the 1977 television special *Bing Crosby's Merrie Olde Christmas*, but only released as a single five years later), it's still bizarre to see the singer of *Life On Mars?* duetting with the crooner behind *White Christmas*. But there, it happened and this is proof.

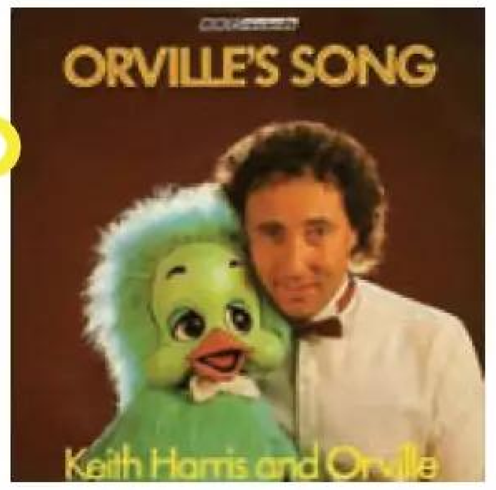


ALL THE LOVE IN THE WORLD
DIONNE WARWICK
(ARISTA)

Written by The Bee Gees (and you can *so* tell), this was spun from Warwick's 1982 album *Heartbreaker*, which was produced by Barry Gibb – who also sings backing vocals here – plus Karl Richardson and Albhy Galuten. Despite charting high over here, it just missed the Billboard Hot 100 in the US (peaking at No.101).

TIME (CLOCK OF THE HEART)
CULTURE CLUB
(VIRGIN)

All eyes were on Culture Club with this one. The band's follow-up single after the chart-conquering *Do You Really Want To Hurt Me*, the question was, would Boy George and co. turn out to be a one-hit flash-in-the-pan, or could they match that first 45's success second time around? Okay, so *Time (Clock Of The Heart)* couldn't quite equal *Do You Really Want To Hurt Me*'s stellar box office (little did we know that *Karma Chameleon* was less than a year away), but it's still a keeper, peaking at No.3 in the UK and No.2 in the United States. It was only kept off chart-topping glory by Irene Cara's *Flashdance... What A Feeling*).



ORVILLE'S SONG
KEITH HARRIS AND ORVILLE
(BBC)

Tell any Gen Z-er that one of the biggest draws on British TV in the early 1980s was a green duck in a nappy who spoke in a falsetto Yorkshire accent and they'd think you've been on the Mary-Jane. But Keith Harris (he being the ventriloquist behind the duck) and his pea-coloured dummy Orville were indeed titanic names on our screens back then, so much so that the BBC decided to take the duo into the charts, via this mawkish novelty tune. *Orville's Song* (sample lyrics: "Orville: I wish that I had a mummy and dad but I don't/ Keith: You don't?/ Orville: I don't!") shifted a staggering 400,000 discs, copies of which you can still find in many, many, *many* British Heart Foundation shops.

Black Grape reboot their "cosmic musical jigsaw" for fourth album *Orange Head*

© Paul Husband

grape expect

ations

SHAUN RYDER MADE THE ULTIMATE COMEBACK IN THE MID-90s WITH BLACK GRAPE. NOW 30 YEARS ON FROM THEIR FORMATION, SHAUN AND BANDMATE KERMIT RETURN WITH A NEW ALBUM THAT'S AS FIERY AND VITAL AS ANYTHING FROM THEIR FIRST PHASE...

STEVE O'BRIEN

It's 1993 and Shaun Ryder, formerly of the Happy Mondays, is lost. Without a band for the first time in 13 years, he hooks up with his old Mondays comrade Bez and with Paul 'Kermit' Leveridge – once of Manchester's Ruthless Rap Assassins – for a fresh musical project that few see going anywhere.

Yet Black Grape would make Shaun William Ryder Britpop's comeback kid, with the group's genre-warping debut album, *It's Great When You're Straight...Yeah*, hitting No.1 in the UK and its first two 45s – *Reverend Black Grape* and *In The Name Of The Father* – going Top 10. "You know, Black Grape sold more records than the Mondays and we had bigger success than the Mondays," Ryder tells *Classic Pop* from his home in Manchester. "I would spend more time doing Black Grape, but the Mondays takes up a lot of my life."

Whereas in '93, Black Grape replaced the Happy Mondays as Shaun Ryder's centre of attention, these days he juggles both, as well as a third gig with indie supergroup Mantra Of The Cosmos (with Bez again, plus Ride's Andy Bell and Ringo Starr's sticksman son Zak Starkey). Now in his sixties, Shaun's busier than he ever was in his thirties and forties ("you get a lot more done when you're not full of fucking drugs," he laughs). It seems, though, as if Black Grape is the one that he's most proud of. After all, since the Mondays regrouped in 2012, they've not put out any new material. Black Grape, on the other hand, have released two long-players since their 2015 reunion, including the upcoming *Orange Head*, which sees Shaun and Kermit team up with producers including Martin 'Youth' Glover for a record that's as dizzily eclectic as anything from their 90s prime.

"I think the album's a real grower," Shaun says, excitedly. "I've sent it out to me cousins and the first day they had it, they were like, 'This is my favourite!', and then over a period of a month, it had totally turned around and they had different favourites."

Pills 'n' Films and Bellyaches

In mid-2021 we spoke to Ryder about what seemed at the time the imminent production of a biopic based on his life. There, he revealed that original actor Jack O'Connell (*This Is England*) had left the project. "Jack's filming somewhere else and he won't be finished," Shaun told us, "so if we want to start filming in September [2021] we have to get someone else in."

However, two-and-a-half years on, Ryder tells *Classic Pop* the movie is stuck in development hell.

"Matt Greenhalgh wrote the script and was gonna direct," he says. "So we got the money, half-English, half-American and Matt fell out with the Americans. They didn't want to make the film that Matt wanted to make. They wanted to make a film like all those other biopics, so it had to have a certain bit of this and a certain bit of that. So the American money went and it all went tits up really. Matt's still working on getting it made, so that's where he is now. He's actually just done the Amy Winehouse film [*Back To Black*, which he's scripted, but is directed by Sam Taylor-Johnson] and I think he's done about three or four movies since we started getting this one made. So at the moment, he's just looking for another lot of backers."

© Getty

Ryder's memory is, understandably after decades of chemically-assisted hedonism, not great, and he can barely remember which tracks are on *Orange Head*. It's been 12 months since he and Kermit finished the album and, he says, "All the songs have disappeared off me phone and iPad!" He's also the world's worst Black Grape – and indeed Shaun Ryder – expert, at various points asking *Classic Pop* if *It's Great When You're Straight...Yeah* was the first Black Grape album (it is), what Mondays LP *Step On* is off (*Pills 'n' Thrills And Bellyaches*) and what the latest album's first single was (that's *Milk*).

Yet his enthusiasm for Black Grape is irresistible and that's partly to do with how much healthier his relationship is with bandmate Kermit now, compared to how it was in the group's drug-addled heyday.

"Well, we don't punch or throw bottles at each other anymore," he laughs, "'cos we're not out of our minds on crack and heroin!"

Black Grape Mk.1 imploded in 1998 shortly after the release of their second LP, *Stupid Stupid Stupid*. Seventeen years later, both now clean, Shaun and Kermit reunited for the 20th anniversary of *It's Great When You're Straight...Yeah*, and released a comeback single, *We Are England*, for UEFA Euro 2016. That in turn led to a third album in 2017, the No.15-charting *Pop Voodoo*.

Today, Kermit lives in Liverpool, just half an hour's train ride from Manchester. Though the two of them could write over Zoom or FaceTime, both prefer to do it in person, like in the old days, even if the vodka and black rock's been replaced by Tetley's and Pringles.

"We're both changed people now we're not out of our minds and haven't got habits anymore," Shaun explains, having beaten his addiction in the mid-00s. "When it comes to lyrics we'll sit facing each other like *Alas Smith And Jones*. Me and him will do a lot of freestyling and then we'll write it down. We just bounce off each other. When we got back together, that was still there but without the violence."

That's not to say it's all rainbows and buttercups in Black Grape world. They may be free of the crack and the smack, but Shaun and Kermit can still butt heads, if not literally this time round.

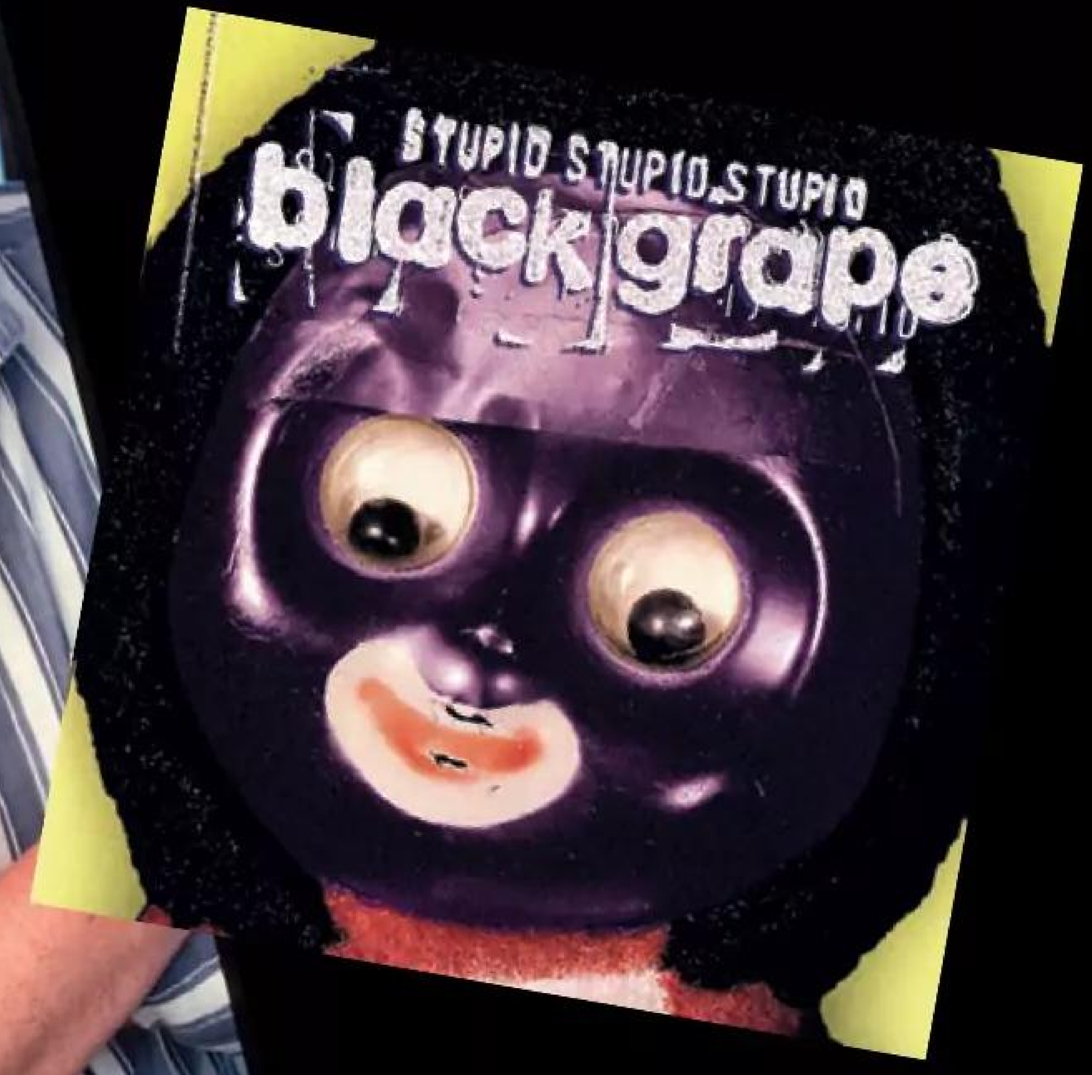
"It can get heated," Ryder admits, "like when Youth's in the middle of something and Kermit'll be trying to get him to do something and I just want him to leave Youth alone. So it can still get intense, but nothing like it used to be."

"We fell out in a really bad way," Kermit tells *Classic Pop*, when we speak to him a few days later. "We didn't see each other for about 15 years, 'cos we were both a couple of crackheads all through Black Grape – we were totally spangled the whole time. So we're careful now with our boundaries towards each other. That's not to say I don't have a lot of room for him, 'cos I do, and I know he's got a lot of room for me."

"We're a bit more, what's the word – aware now," he says. "So we do bits ourselves and then come together. Shaun works like a rapper and I'm used to that. The first time I did some stuff with the Mondays [Kermit sang guest vocals on the *Yes Please!* track *Cut 'Em Loose Bruce*] I was like, wow, okay, this could work. I don't know what it is, when we come together to do stuff, we have our own palette, so to speak, which he wouldn't have on his own and I wouldn't have on my own."

Get Higher: Kermit and Shaun in 1995, the year *It's Great When You're Straight... Yeah* debuted at UK No.1

© Getty



"When it comes to lyrics we'll sit facing each other like *Alas Smith And Jones.*" – Shaun Ryder on his writing partnership with Kermit

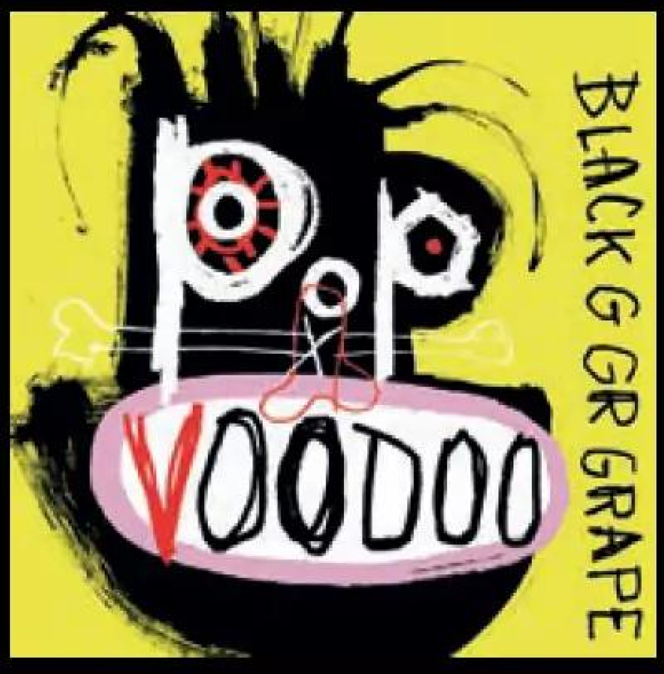
© Paul Husband

"We don't punch or throw bottles at each other anymore, 'cos we're not out of our minds on crack and heroin!" SHAUN RYDER

Any thoughts that sobriety may have softened the sonics of Black Grape, or dulled the edges of Ryder's lyrical brilliance need to know that *Orange Head* is as fizzing with ideas, and as musically unruly, as anything from their 90s catalogue. And some of those songs are, as we speak in October 2023, about to get a live workout as Shaun and Kermit head off for a run of UK gigs. But before that there's a series of Happy Mondays dates, and after they're done and dusted, Ryder's got to finish off Mantra Of The Cosmos' first album. Busy busy busy.

"I've been doing Black Grape interviews, Mondays interviews and Mantra interviews all at the same time," he laughs, "so I get quite mixed up."

Ryder says, however, that the Mondays will be taking a couple of years off after April. "That means I just carry on with Black Grape and Mantra," he says, almost sounding relieved at the prospect. So, we presume, there's no new Mondays album in the offing? Having split after 1992's Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth-produced *Yes Please!*, the band (sans several of its original members) released just one LP, 2007's *Uncle Dysfunktional.* But since the classic line-up reformed in 2012, there's been... well, zilch.



"[Head of Creation Management] Alan McGee's been trying to get a Mondays album organised," Shaun says about the possibility of new material from the band that invented Madchester, "but I don't know if I wanna do that." He pauses. "Now our kid's not here [Shaun's brother Paul, who played bass in the band, died suddenly in July 2022] it'll be a lot easier to do a Mondays album. The trouble I had with our Paul is that he was still stuck in the 80s and 90s when it came to recording and doing things, like, 'Let's go to Real World and spend months down there.' I work really quick in Black Grape. I mean now, we could go and do a Mondays album, get Youth to produce it, and you could do that in three weeks. I've just gotta write the fucking thing!"

So what would the Mondays sound like in 2024? Anyone expecting *Bummed II*, it seems, had better think again.

"What we always did with the Mondays, is that every album was different to the last," Ryder says. "*Bummed* was nothing like *Squirrel And G-Man* and that was nothing like *Pills 'n' Thrills And Bellyaches.* And the last album that we split up over [*Yes Please!*], that was different again. Sunny Levine produced *Uncle Dysfunktional* and again it moved on. It wasn't lyrically my best record. In the mid-noughties I was still coming out of the madness and had writer's block. But it's still a good, entertaining album."

So when Shaun's writing now, does he ever think, hmm, this could be a Mondays track?

"There's plenty of times I'll write some stuff down, and it's a load of shit," he laughs. "But if I come up with something like 'Call the cops' or 'You're twisting my melon, man' [both from *Step On*] or 'We're 24-hour party people', that could fit in Mantra, Black Grape or the Mondays."

Today, though, Shaun Ryder is in full and focused Black Grape mode. "You know," Shaun tells us, "I would probably fly over to Youth's studio in Spain every fortnight to make a Black Grape album!"

At the age of 61, the 90s' ultimate indie bad boy is quite possibly the 2020s' hardest-working musician. Proof, if it was ever needed, that it really is great to be straight (yeah).

● *Orange Head* will be released via DGAFF Records on 19 January 2024 and is reviewed on page 83.

VIRGINS AND PHILISTINES

THE COLOURFIELD

WHEN TERRY HALL DIED LAST DECEMBER, HIS MID-80s BAND, THE COLOURFIELD, WERE LARGELY OVERLOOKED BY OBITUARIES. NONETHELESS, THEIR DEBUT ALBUM, *VIRGINS AND PHILISTINES*, REMAINS A HIGHLIGHT IN THE BACK CATALOGUE OF THE MAN THAT DAMON ALBARN CALLED "THE COOLEST HUMAN BEING ON EARTH".

WYNDHAM WALLACE

"*Old Misery-Guts Is Back*" announced *Smash Hits*' Valentine's Day 1985 edition, welcoming Terry Hall's latest venture, The Colourfield, in typically irreverent fashion. Perhaps the pop bible thought the Coventry-born singer had cause to be low: a year earlier, following two UK Top 5 albums with The Specials and two Top 20 albums with Fun Boy Three, his new trio's eponymous debut single had fallen short of the Top 40, with follow-up *Take* faring worse still. Even when the deceptively charming *Thinking Of You* returned him to *Top Of The Pops*, Hall looked impatient to leave, grudgingly immobile in an unpretentious Next For Men outfit, sweater tossed casually around his shoulders.

Terry, however, cared little for commercial success. "I honestly don't think about it anymore," he told Music Box TV. "I did with Fun Boy Three because I was trying to keep people in wages and stuff. But the people I work with now... they don't expect anything. Neither do I." Anyway, he acknowledged, it was easy to mistake his demeanour. That Easter, on Manchester's Piccadilly Radio, he introduced himself as 'Mr. Misery', a nickname he'd reiterate a fortnight later on *Yours Sincerely* when their first album, *Virgins And Philistines*, reached record stores.

Despite being manic depressive (if, at that point, undiagnosed), Hall wasn't as dour as his hangdog appearance suggested. Instead, he was self-aware, demonstrating – both in person and in lyrics like *Take*'s "But me and the cat own the lease on the flat/ And nothing you do will ever change that" – a dry wit and a wry cynicism. Asked once why he rarely smiled, he deadpanned, "I've never felt it necessary".

Now Hall was happy, and he didn't mince his words about why. "I went through a stage at the end of the Fun Boy Three when I detested everything. I'm much better now, though. I don't detest everything, just *most* things." In fact, he'd hated the job right away. Quizzed about dispensing with his 'mushroom hair', he divulged that "I felt that I had to look like a complete idiot in order to sell records. We were basically such a crap group." By the end, he told his Piccadilly Radio listeners, "It made me very ill... My mum wanted me to go on the buses just to have a 9-5."

Duly conceived to function differently, The Colourfield emerged from conversations with Fun Boy Three's touring keyboardist, Toby Lyons. "We just felt that we were in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong people," Hall informed *Smash Hits.* "The main problem was we were into different music: they liked Billy Ocean and we didn't." They'd become friends after Lyons' The Swinging Cats had opened for The Specials in 1980 – "We didn't see each other for a while," Hall quipped to *Saturday Superstore*'s Sarah Greene, "while I got on with being a rock star" – and, keeping it in the family, they turned next to a fellow Cat, multi-instrumentalist Karl Shale.

> "I'VE ALWAYS FELT IT WAS IMPORTANT TO TRY DIFFERENT THINGS. IT'S ALWAYS BAFFLED ME WHEN PEOPLE SAY, 'WE'VE GOT A TOTALLY DIFFERENT DIRECTION' AND THEY'VE, LIKE, ADDED A FLUTE."
>
> TERRY HALL

Adopting the name of a mid-century style of abstract painting, the three relocated to Greater Manchester to hunt down tickets for Hall's beloved Manchester United as much as a mythical 'right place'.

They found the latter in Stockport's Strawberry Studios, once championed by 10cc. "I tend to record in London and places like that," Hall disclosed on Piccadilly Radio, "but it made such a big difference. There weren't any horrible pressures about staying in horrible hotels in a horrible city." It also offered a freedom that Hall had lacked – "It's not that we don't *want* to be pop stars," he explained to *Smash Hits*, "more that we're not *capable*" – while allowing him to explore new, potentially unfashionable styles.

"I've always felt it was important to try different things," Hall told *Mojo* in 2014. "It's always baffled me when people say, 'We've got a totally different direction' and you listen to it and they've, like, added a flute... With The Colourfield, that's when I started taking up writing as a serious thing and listening to other influences, like Bobby Goldsboro, who you're always told to laugh at, but really the songs are great."

In truth, Hall *had* laughed while recording Goldsboro's *Little Things*, as *Thinking Of You*'s B-side revealed, but this was as affectionate as it was infectious, in keeping with *Virgins And Philistines*' lighter, carefree mood, curated by producers Hugh Jones and Jeremy Green. As Lyons elaborated to Gary Davies on Sky TV in 1985: "We're trying to knock that funereal image on the head". So, with acoustic guitars hogging the speakers, Hall's distinctive, prosaic sensitivity graced a quietly anthemic *Faint Hearts*, a woodwind-embellished title track, a wistful *Sorry* and pastoral *Yours Sincerely*, on which, like *Thinking Of You*, he was joined by Katrina Phillips, variously described by the band as the studio's cleaner and a kiss-o-gram girl who'd pestered them for an audition.

Nonetheless, melancholy proved intrinsic, not least on their initial Echo And The Bunnymen-styled single, and intriguingly Pete 'Bunnyman' de Freitas drummed on the caustic *Take* as well as Hall's bitter, vegetarianism-espousing *Cruel Circus*. Still, Hall mostly eschewed political and social topics in favour of an evergreen, pop-friendly theme, love, with any desolation generally masked by easy listening and Latin styles formerly championed by Goldsboro, Andy Williams and Burt Bacharach. The last show Hall had attended, Piccadilly Radio's listeners learned, was by Cleo Laine.

Reactions to his change of direction were mixed. "The baiting started early," *Record Mirror* wrote of a 1986 gig, "and Hall lost his rag enough to pour a can of beer over one persistent heckler". Moreover, the intoxicating, campaign-closing single *Castles In The Air*, with its inspired castanets, stalled outside the Top 50. The album, though, made No.12 in the UK, leaving behind some of Hall's finest performances on not only songs he'd co-written with Lyons but also covers: a gentle *Windmills Of Your Mind*, recorded, like the effervescent *I Can't Get Enough Of You Baby*, as a B-side, as well as the album's unsurpassable take on The Roches' *Hammond Song*.

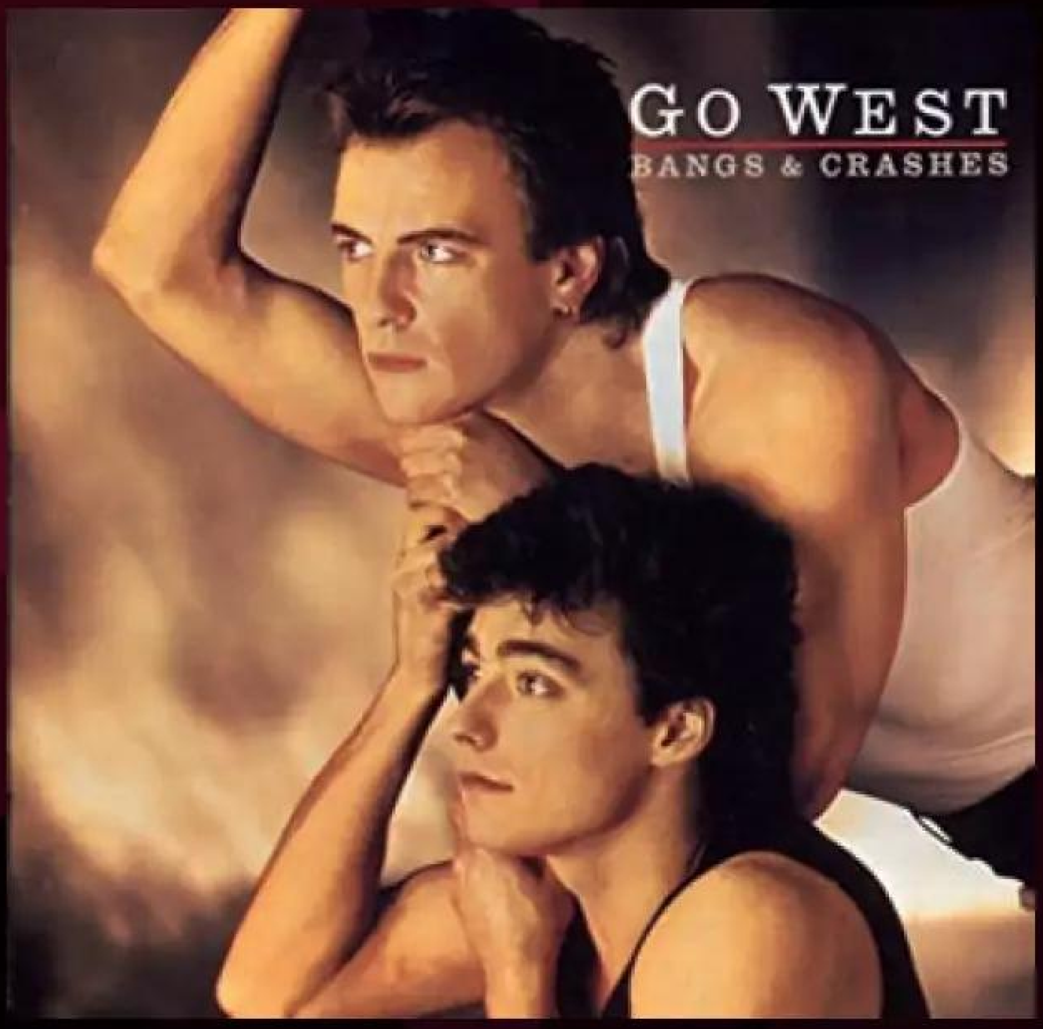
"The least we should do is applaud the miserable bastard," *NME*'s review concluded, damning it with faint praise. Hall, however, probably wouldn't have been bothered. "Success for me now," he'd advise *Music Week* a decade later, "is getting the kids to school without an argument."

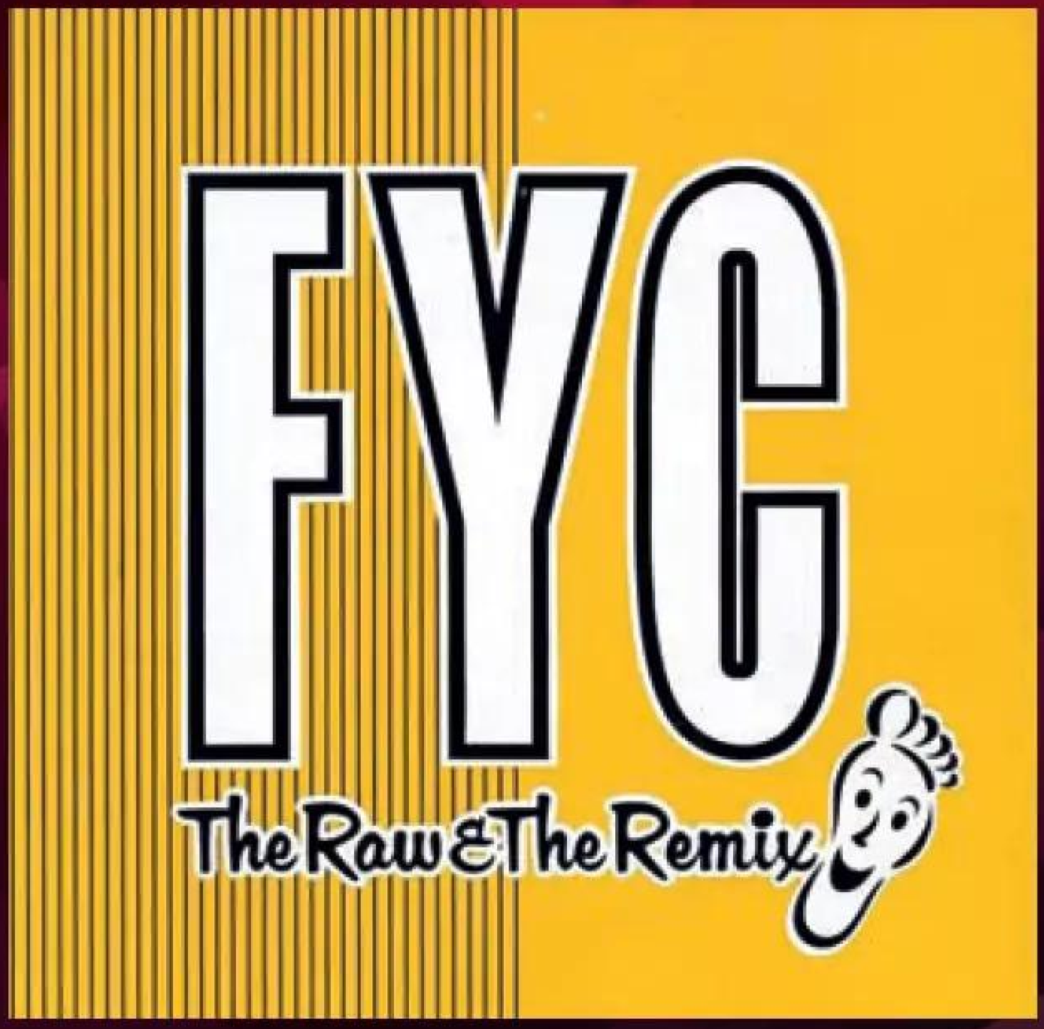
TOP 20 REMIX ALBUMS

WHILE THE MOTIVES OF RECORD LABELS WERE OFTEN CALLED INTO QUESTION, REMIX ALBUMS WERE CERTAINLY AFFORDABLE AND OFFERED SOMETHING DIFFERENT FOR THE MUSIC CONSUMER, AS OUR LATEST COUNTDOWN REVEALS

BARRY PAGE

In the early 80s, savvy record labels were well aware of the proliferating popularity of the 12-inch remix – a phenomenon that originated in the disco era – and realised they could create entire albums on a tight budget using previously released material, and often with little artist involvement. For many consumers and critics the remix album was just a stopgap release – or worse still an opportunistic money-grabbing exercise – but more often than not these mid-priced collections allowed artists to present their work in a very different light. Some even turned the format into a veritable art form. Covering the period 1981 to 1990, we've picked out a decade's worth of these pocket money-friendly delights.





20

GO WEST
BANGS & CRASHES (1986)

By the time Go West had collected their British Breakthrough Act award at the BRITs in February 1986 it'd been almost 12 months since the release of their hit-packed debut album, while follow-up *Dancing On The Couch* was another year away. In the interim, Chrysalis released this double LP of odds and sods, which collected remixes, non-album cuts – including *One Way Street*, their contribution to the *Rocky IV* soundtrack – and live tracks such as *Ball Of Confusion*, which saw backing vocalists Carol Kenyon and Sylvia Mason-James taking the lead on the Motown classic.

19

EURYTHMICS
TOUCH DANCE (1984)

Testament to their work ethic, Eurythmics recorded and mixed *Touch*, the quickfire follow-up to breakthrough album *Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This)*, in just three weeks, and by spring 1984 the duo had five Top 10 hits. RCA capitalised on their popularity with companion LP *Touch Dance*, which comprised newly-commissioned vocal and instrumental remixes by then-hot producers François Kevorkian and John 'Jellybean' Benitez. The much-overlooked LP was unusual in that it reworked tracks which weren't hit singles, though Annie and Dave reportedly didn't approve of the release.

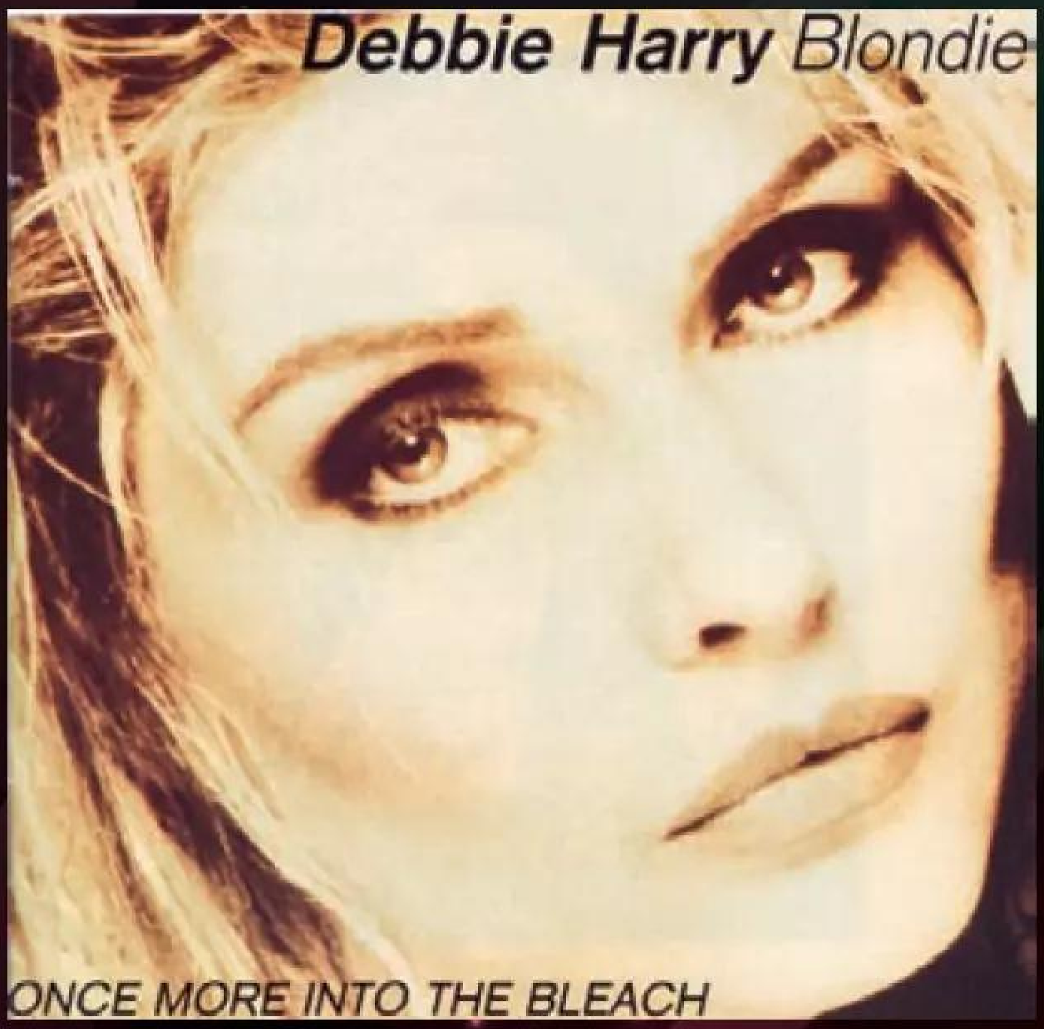
18

FINE YOUNG CANNIBALS
THE RAW & THE REMIX (1990)

Ostensibly released to buy FYC time following the huge transatlantic success of *The Raw And The Cooked* and its attendant singles, this album rounded up an array of interesting interpretations of some of their hits. Featuring the London-born rapper, the 'Monie Love Remix' of *She Drives Me Crazy* was indicative of the creativity on offer, but some reviewers were left unimpressed: "The Cannibals have written some pristine pop songs in their time," wrote *Record Mirror*, "none of which could possibly be improved by nailing loud n' tinny drum machine bits onto either end."

17
ALEXANDER O'NEAL
HEARSAY: ALL MIXED UP (1988)

Upon reuniting with esteemed hitmakers Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis and former members of The Time – who under Prince's tutelage had helped to develop the Minneapolis funk-rock sound – debonair vocalist Alexander O'Neal racked up a number of hits in the mid-80s, reaching a high-water mark with classic concept album *Hearsay*. Companion set *All Mixed Up* mopped up period remixes, but also included exclusive takes such as the 'House Mix 'of *Fake*. The album was particularly appealing to club DJs since it largely eliminated the intermittent party chat permeating its counterpart's grooves.

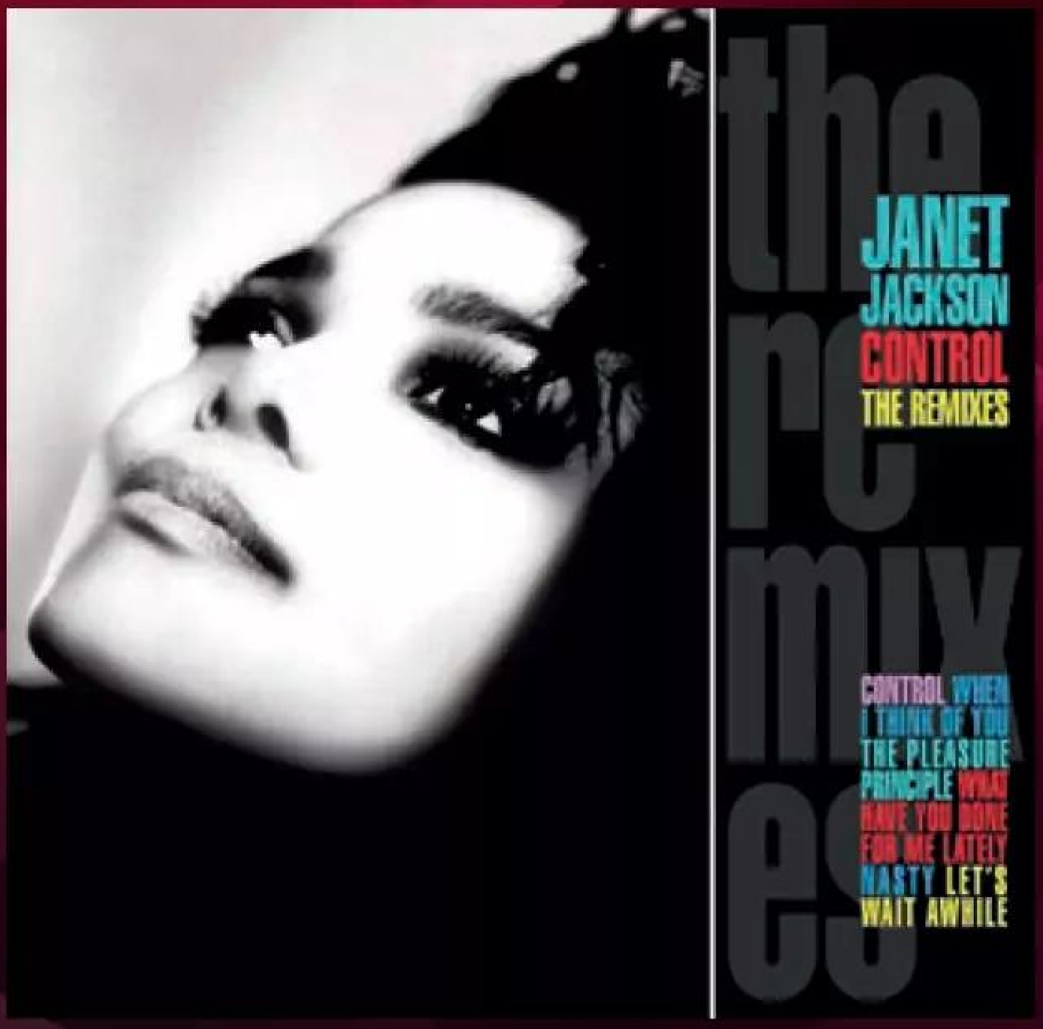


16
DEBBIE HARRY AND BLONDIE
ONCE MORE INTO THE BLEACH (1988)

Featuring contemporary new versions of Blondie hits by hip producers such as Coldcut, Ben Liebrand and Shep Pettibone, this Shakespeare-punning double album received a mixed response, but it was an essential purchase for Debbie Harry fans since it also collected a number of period remixes spanning her then entire solo career, including contributions to the *Scarface* and *Krush Groove* soundtracks. Very much a low-key release, it bombed amidst the Christmas rush, but Blondie's label persevered with the concept, and 1995's *Beautiful: The Remix Album* spawned several successful singles.

15
BRONSKI BEAT
HUNDREDS & THOUSANDS (1985)

Following Jimmy Somerville's acrimonious departure from Bronski Beat, his former bandmates were left to pick up the pieces, some of which would appear on this collection. Released mere weeks before their *Hit That Perfect Beat* single with new singer John Foster, the set featured remixes of tracks on landmark album *The Age Of Consent*, as well as extended versions of *Run From Love* and *Hard Rain*, the two proposed sides of an unreleased single. The cassette and CD formats included selected B-sides and *I Feel Love*, their hit duet with Marc Almond.



14
JANET JACKSON
CONTROL: THE REMIXES (1987)

Taking a leaf out of brother Michael's book, Janet Jackson released seven singles from *Control*, the hit album she'd recorded with Jam and Lewis. Its companion remix LP collected many of the singles' extended versions, with highlights including the 10-minute, jazz-infused 'Cool Summer Mix (Part Two)' of *Nasty*, which featured the trumpet skills of Herb Alpert. *Record Mirror* were certainly impressed, writing: "There is more room for the keyboards and horns, and there is more room to improvise on the basic theme and to take it in directions the original did not have space for."

13
SPANDAU BALLET
THE TWELVE INCH MIXES (1986)

Astute businessmen as well as excellent musicians, Spandau Ballet had it written into their contract that Chrysalis would pick up the bill for their singles remixes as well as their promotional videos, but by 1985 relations with the label had soured. Islington's finest eventually jumped ship to Sony, leaving their disgruntled former employers to cash in with the band at their commercial peak, first with the best-selling *Singles Collection*, and a year later with the similarly unapproved *The Twelve Inch Mixes*, which does a fine job of collecting the majority of their extended reboots.

12
THE B-52S
PARTY MIX! (1981)

In buying time before the release of their third studio album, The B-52s accidentally became the originators of the remix album phenomenon, easily beating the likes of Soft Cell and The Human League to the punch. A record that recognised the proliferating popularity of the extended dance mix in addition to enhancing the Athens-based band's good-time party credentials, *Party Mix!* did exactly what it said on the tin, segueing three songs from each of their first two albums to form two irresistible medleys, replete with playful overdubs that amplified the fun factor.

11

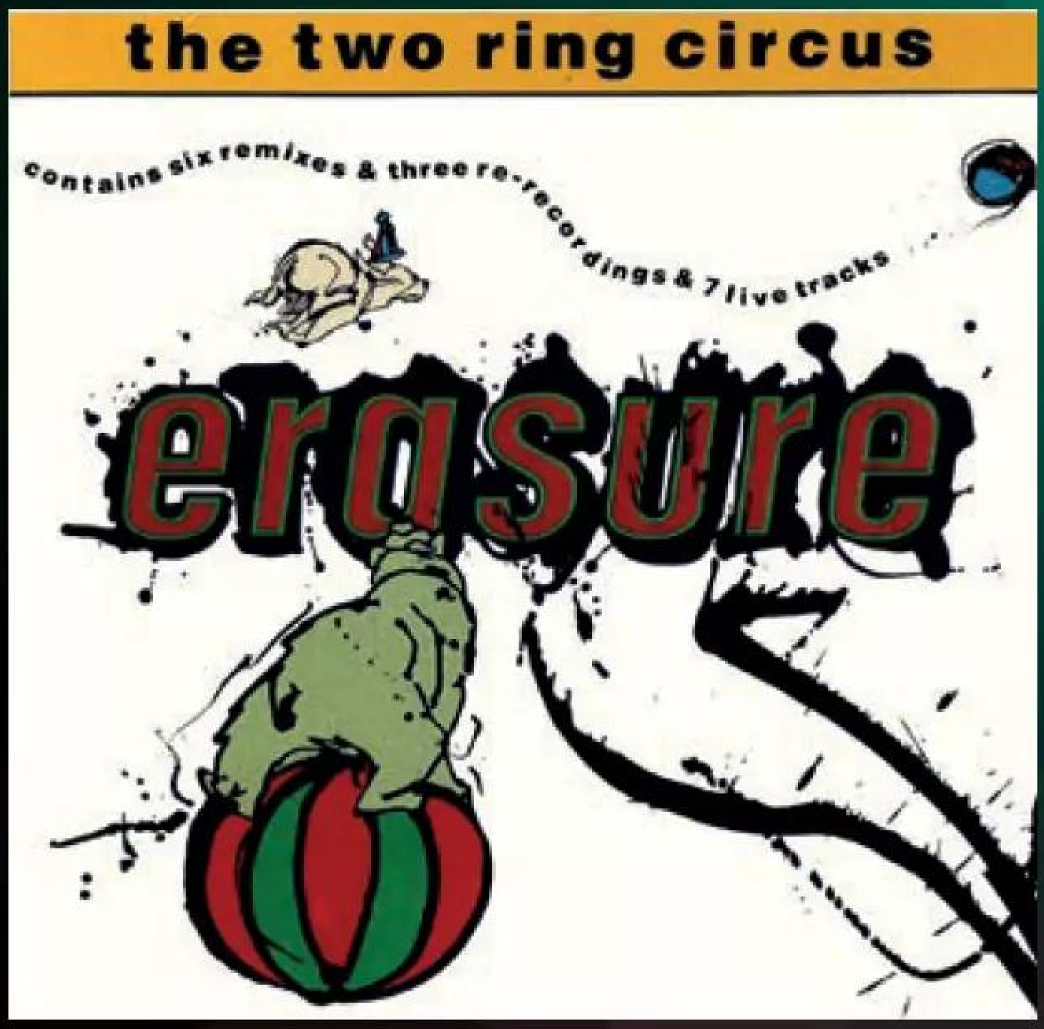
BILLY IDOL
VITAL IDOL (1985)

With his videos gaining heavy rotation on the fledgling MTV channel, Billy Idol became a huge star in the United States, but across the Atlantic UK record buyers were slower to latch on to his talents, and big sellers such as *White Wedding* and *Rebel Yell* took a few years to attain hit status. 1985's *Vital Idol* was an album that cashed in on his new-found domestic popularity, and largely rounded up previously released remixes, such as the stunning 'Shotgun Mix' of *White Wedding*, which neatly segued the two disparate parts of the classic single.

10

THE CURE
MIXED UP (1990)

Burned out in the aftermath of the gloomy introspection that was 1989's *Disintegration* album, Robert Smith was keen to work on something lighter, and turned to The Cure's back catalogue as a way of maintaining career momentum. Whilst *Mixed Up* included previously released extended mixes, there was one new track in *Never Enough*, as well as a smattering of contemporary new remixes. In the case of *A Forest* and *The Walk*, these had to be reconstructed as, according to Smith, the master tapes languishing in Fiction Records' utility room had disappeared.



09

ERASURE
THE TWO RING CIRCUS (1987)

Twelve months on from achieving their commercial breakthrough with the single *Sometimes*, Erasure released this companion to hit album *The Circus*. With its nine tracks spread across two 45rpm-playing 12-inch singles – thus rendering the set ineligible for the charts – *The Two Ring Circus* included six new remixes. But the real draw came in the form of the orchestral re-recordings of *If I Could*, *Spiralling* and *My Heart... So Blue*. Substituting synths for strings, these stark new arrangements by Andrew Poppy highlighted both the strength and vulnerability in Andy Bell's octave-spanning vocals.

08

UB40
PRESENT ARMS IN DUB (1981)

Inspired by King Tubby and Lee 'Scratch' Perry, the Jamaican record producers who'd pioneered the art of dubbing, UB40 decided to cut this instrumental version of sophomore album *Present Arms*. Indicative of their popularity at the time it sold well, but as Ali Campbell later told *MusicRadar*, not all record buyers were receptive to the sonic detour: "People started returning the album in droves, complaining that there was something wrong with it. They were walking into record shops saying, 'Half the instruments are missing and there are weird echoes all over the place.'"

07

IMAGINATION
NIGHT DUBBING (1983)

Having kept the spirit of disco alive in the early 80s with hits like *Body Talk* and *Just An Illusion*, Imagination reached their critical and commercial peak with this innovative album, which had an enticing price point of just £2.99. Stemming from a request from legendary DJ Larry Levan to remix one of their tracks, producers Jolley and Swain were subsequently commissioned to create an entire album of new remixes. Utilising an array of experimental studio techniques – swinging microphones over loudspeakers, for example – the tracks were given a fresh and fun makeover.

06

PROPAGANDA
WISHFUL THINKING (1985)

This set of so-called "disturbdances" was the result of ZTT Records co-founder Paul Morley's desire to craft a version of Propaganda's debut album that aligned with his musical tastes. "I wanted them to be the kind of group that would go on tour with Depeche Mode or Cabaret Voltaire," he told writer Andrew Harrison. Although panned by *Smash Hits* and *Record Mirror*, *Melody Maker* felt it was an "inspired introduction" to the band's "complex beauty", and there was another fan in filmmaker John Hughes, who used the track *Abuse* in teen drama *Some Kind Of Wonderful*.

05

HOWARD JONES
THE 12" ALBUM (1984)

"I don't wanna be hip and cool," sang Howard Jones, but the outlandishly-coiffed pop philosopher was very much in vogue in the mid-80s and scored several memorable hits, four of which were included in extended form on this mid-priced set. Its release coincided with a major UK tour in December 1984, and included the trilingual 'International Mix' of standalone single *Like To Get To Know You Well*, and two exclusives in early live favourite *Always Asking Questions* and a re-recording of breakthrough hit *New Song* originally intended for debut album *Human's Lib*.

04

SOFT CELL
NON STOP ECSTATIC DANCING (1982)

Literally riding high on the back of the success of *Tainted Love* and its parent album, Soft Cell reunited with producer Mike Thorne to cut this record in New York, whose nightclubs were continuing to rattle with ecstasy pills. In thrall to these psychedelics, the duo increased the BPMs, reworking material both from *Non-Stop Erotic Cabaret* and their earliest singles, as well as throwing in another Northern Soul cover in Melinda Marx's 1965 single *What*. Marc Almond felt the opportunity to fully embrace US club culture was missed, but the LP was a critical and commercial success.

03

PET SHOP BOYS
DISCO (1986)

Described by *Smash Hits* as a "daft mishmash of crashing drums, stupid sound effects and insanely catchy tunes", this inexpensive set rounded up extended versions of the four hits from debut album *Please* – including the incredible 'Full Horror' mix of *Suburbia* – and classic B-sides *Paninaro* and *In The Night*, the latter of which was adopted as the theme tune to the BBC's *The Clothes Show*. Other volumes of *Disco* would follow, but it's the original that remains both the definitive PSBs remix album and one of the finest examples of its ilk.

02

MADONNA
YOU CAN DANCE (1987)

Originally pencilled in for a 1986 release but delayed to allow further promotion of the *True Blue* album, this huge-selling release from the Material Girl skilfully sequenced new remixes of tracks from her first three studio albums to form one continuous club-friendly groove. There was also an exclusive new song in *Spotlight*, which had originally been touted as a follow-up to *Holiday*. Madonna was so enamoured with the Shep Pettibone remix of *Into The Groove* that she performed this version in concert. Where's the party? It's right here on this groundbreaking album.

01

THE LEAGUE UNLIMITED ORCHESTRA
LOVE AND DANCING (1982)

Following up the gargantuan success of *Dare* proved to be somewhat problematic for The Human League. However, this mid-priced collection of largely instrumental versions of *Dare*-period songs – including attendant B-side *Hard Times* – alleviated some of the pressure. This was no ordinary remix LP, though, and to label it a mere career stopgap would be doing it a disservice. A major feat of editing and engineering, the album was the brainchild of League knob-twiddler Martin Rushent, inspired by the mixing skills and turntable mastery of Grandmaster Flash. A labour of love for the self-confessed workaholic, the project was completed the hard way. With samplers still in their infancy, the tracks were painstakingly assembled from more than 2,600 edits, while the stuttering vocal effects were created using an innovative technique that involved using a custom-made ruler to cut sections of the *Dare* multitrack and glueing them back together. Released under The League Unlimited Orchestra – a nod to Barry White's backing group – *Love And Dancing* was a success, and has since drawn a host of admirers, including Phil Oakey. From Rushent with love, it's one of the greatest electronic albums ever made.

"The project was completed the hard way. With samplers still in their infancy, the tracks were painstakingly assembled from more than 2,600 edits."

WAH! GAMES

ONE OF THE GREAT MAVERICKS OF ALTERNATIVE POP, IT'S TAKEN 40 YEARS FOR PETE WYLIE TO CREATE A DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO HIS SINGULAR WORLDVIEW. SINCE STARTING OUT ALONGSIDE IAN McCULLOCH, JULIAN COPE AND PETE BURNS IN LIVERPOOL'S FAMED LATE-70s ERIC'S SCENE, VIA HIS WAH! COLLECTIVE WYLIE HAS CREATED MANY FABULOUS VARIATIONS ON MEANINGFUL POP. AS HE NOW TELLS US: "I DUCKED OUT EVERY TIME IT LOOKED LIKE I WAS GETTING A FOLLOWING."

JOHN EARLS

"This house is called Disgraceland, for obvious reasons." Pete Wylie guides his laptop camera to give *Classic Pop* a tour of the living room of his home in Liverpool. It's a riot of colour, impossible to keep track of the collection of books, Funko Pop dolls and memorabilia on the shelves. There's a painting of the singer by Pete Townshend on the wall. More of that later.

After first sitting on his remote control – "Don't suppose you want to watch *Doctors*?", asks Wylie as the BBC1 daytime soap promptly starts up – the born raconteur spends the next 90 minutes recounting a life in service to pop music. "If all I had to do was music, I'd be fine," summarises Wylie of his approach to life. "Some stupid person decided I have to live a whole life as well. Really, that's the hard part for me."

That interviewing Wylie is more like being entertained in An Audience With, a performance full of one-liners and unlikely yet plainly true tales from the periphery of the mainstream, will be no surprise to anyone who's seen Pete – or any of the variants of his Wah! band name – in concert. "I'll out-heckle anyone who tries to heckle me at the live shows," he grins. "I talk, joke, mess around. People have told me: 'That was brilliant. It's a shame you had to play the songs in between.'"

There's a serious side to Wylie's mischief. During lockdown two years ago, he was diagnosed with ADHD. "The diagnosis explains a lot," Pete considers, whose welcoming humour softens his burly presence. "People have told me: 'Well, *obviously* you're ADHD,' but they're just going on the tabloid headlines about what it means. It's hard work a lot of the time. I can see how ADHD could cripple people, because at times it's crippled me. But it's been alright for me in the long run. I've achieved things that I'm chuffed about and lost things I might have had."

He believes his condition might be part of the reason he became a musician: "The best place if you're neurodivergent is the music business. People don't notice it there. So many artists that I love were neurodivergent: Syd Barrett, Jimi Hendrix...

"Being weird wasn't a disadvantage. This business gave us some leeway. I'm not sure how helpful that was at times, but being weird wasn't something that I particularly had to tackle."

CLUB CULTURE

Where Wylie feels he was definitely fortunate was coming of age in Liverpool in the late 70s, when the legendary club Eric's was starting up. As a guitarist, Wylie's first band, Crucial Three, was with Ian McCulloch and Julian Cope. His next, The Mystery Girls, featured Cope and Pete Burns. "I always wanted to be the guitarist, not the singer," Wylie insists. "It was only when I left The Mystery Girls that I decided to give it a go."

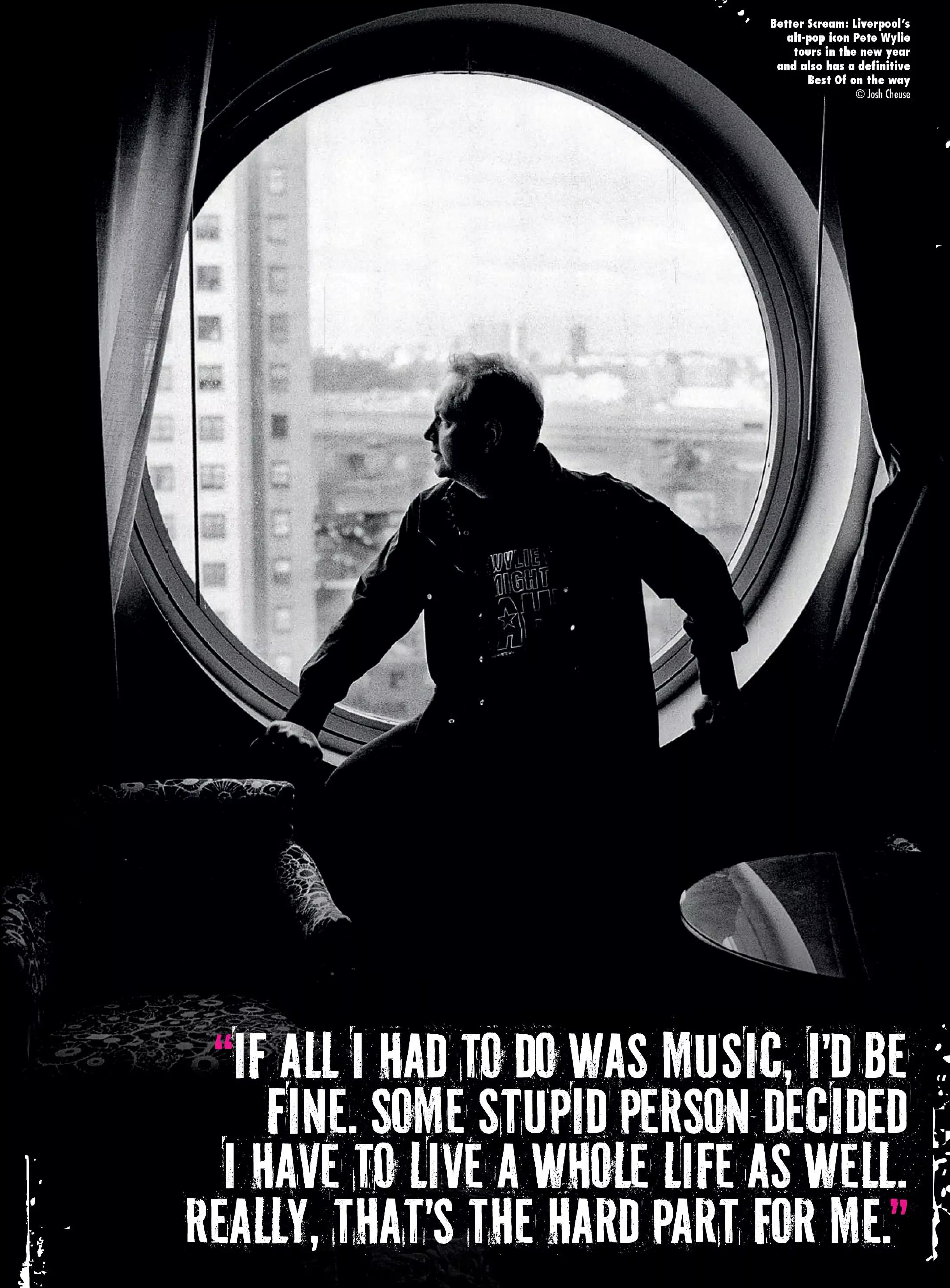
Wylie knew straight away that Burns would be a star, after first seeing the future Dead Or Alive singer with his wife Lynne at a Sex Pistols gig. "Pete and Lynne were always a team," recalls Wylie. "At first you were terrified of them, then you were in awe of them, then you wanted to know them."

He cites Eric's owner, Roger Eagle, as key to helping the city's diverse talents gel, stating: "Anyone who Roger thought had something about them, he'd encourage us to get together. I don't think I'd have had the organisational skills to get a band together without Eric's. We'd work together one week, hate each other the week after, form a different new band with the same people the week after that. Nothing was off the cards."

As a guitarist, Wylie considered his main local competition to be Ian Broudie, then of Big In Japan with Holly Johnson and Bill Drummond, the latter still a friend. Wylie laughs: "Every time Bill comes to Liverpool, he tells me: 'You're still trying to be the best guitarist in Liverpool, but you can't be.' It's a game – we both know Broudie is best. Bill loves to poke me, and I love having to defend myself."

Eventually, Wylie fronted Wah! Heat, releasing influential indie debut single *Better Scream* in 1979. There have been endless variations of the Wah! name since. "I wanted a name that didn't tell anyone of the nature of our music,"

Pete Wylie has had five UK Top 40 hits under the Wah! umbrella, including a version of *Sinful!* made with Madchester band The Farm



Better Scream: Liverpool's alt-pop icon Pete Wylie tours in the new year and also has a definitive Best Of on the way
© Josh Cheuse

"IF ALL I HAD TO DO WAS MUSIC, I'D BE FINE. SOME STUPID PERSON DECIDED I HAVE TO LIVE A WHOLE LIFE AS WELL. REALLY, THAT'S THE HARD PART FOR ME."

"THERE ARE A LOT OF HOLES TO MY STORY. I WANT PEOPLE TO HAVE A FULLER VERSION THAT GETS RID OF SOME OF THE CLICHÉS ABOUT ME."

he reasons. "We got 'Wah!' from Prince Far I records, and at our first gig loads of rastas turned up. I love Shambeko! Say Wah! as a name, because people are still puzzled by it, and Wah Bloody Wah, which was my version for people going on about the name. If you look at the original version of *The Story Of The Blues*, it's as 'JF Wah.' Obviously, it's got a resonance with John F Kennedy – but it also stood for 'Just Fucking Wah'."

In honour of John Peel, who named *The Story Of The Blues* and *Come Back* as his singles of the year in 1983 and 1984, the most well-known version, The Mighty Wah!, has stayed constant since the DJ's death in 2004.

A UK No.3, Wylie cheerfully accepts that *The Story Of The Blues* is one of his best. "It's a big example of wanting to write songs that people going through hard times could relate to," he says. "It was a big change in how I wrote. It showed I was into Motown as much as I was into Pere Ubu and Gang Of Four."

Yet Wylie sabotaged the follow-up single, *Hope*, remembering: "I love *Hope* but, when we went on *The Tube,* just to be contrary we didn't play it. Instead, we did our least commercial song, *Silver And Gold,* which was virtually arthouse and has never even been released. It was my way of saying: 'You don't own me.'"

Around the same time, Wylie rejected supporting U2 on the US tour that culminated in their breakthrough *Under A Blood Red Sky* live album. "Getting to America sounded great and I got on with U2," shrugs Wylie. "Then my manager was told: 'We've tentatively booked a hundred dates' and I immediately went 'Fuck that!' Not because it was hard work, that's just not the kind of band I wanted to be."

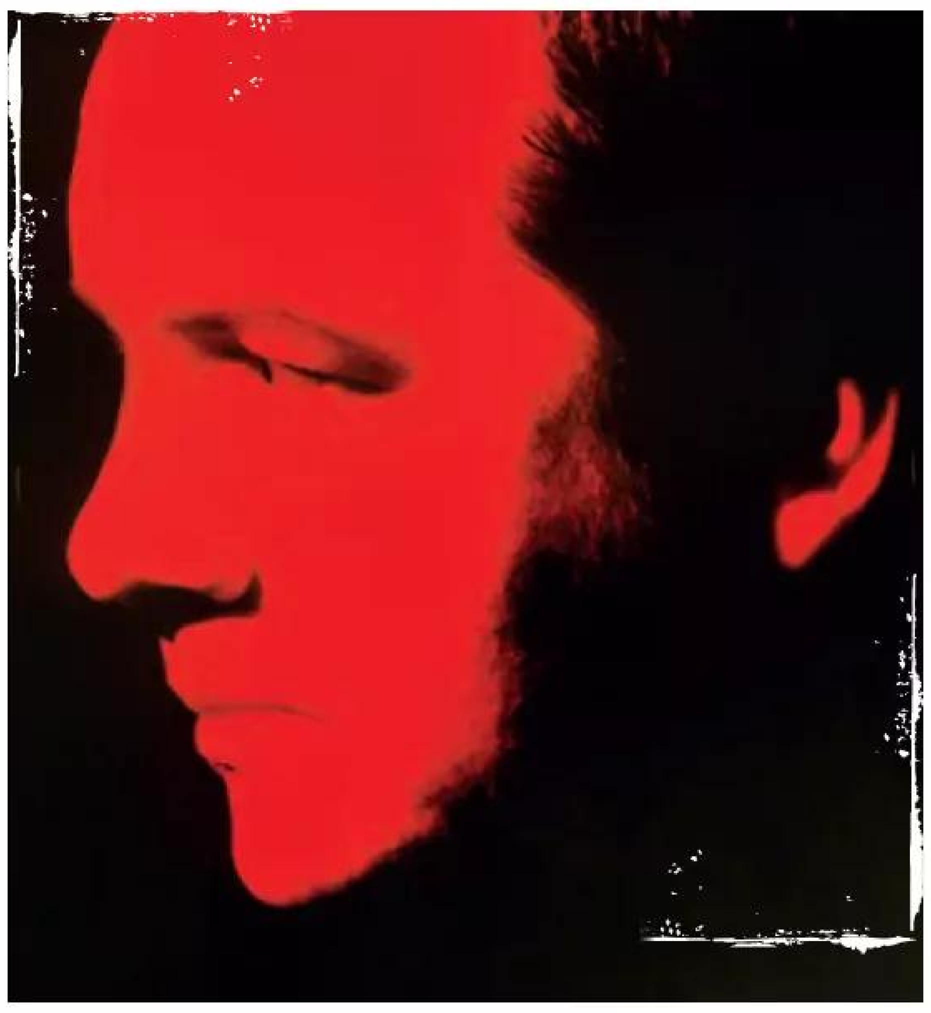
As much as Wylie's innate melodic gift and huge personality mean he should have been a bigger star, he's aware his contrary streak cost him commercially. "A lot of friends in bands, once they found their style, they continued doing that," he rationalises. "Some of them still tour and have a following. But I ducked out every time it looked like I'd get a following. I never stopped writing or demoing, but I wasn't sure why I was making records. So I just stopped releasing them."

There are only seven albums in Wylie's catalogue, and pop music will always be too important to him to compromise. He also believes his desire to write pop "is probably an ADHD thing," as he continues: "Music has different neural triggers to me than most people. The way I record music is to try to share the emotional impact music has on me. I want you to feel the same as how I feel when I hear *Life On Mars?* or *You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling.* I've got to make it clear that it matters, and I try to find a way to concisely articulate it to people."

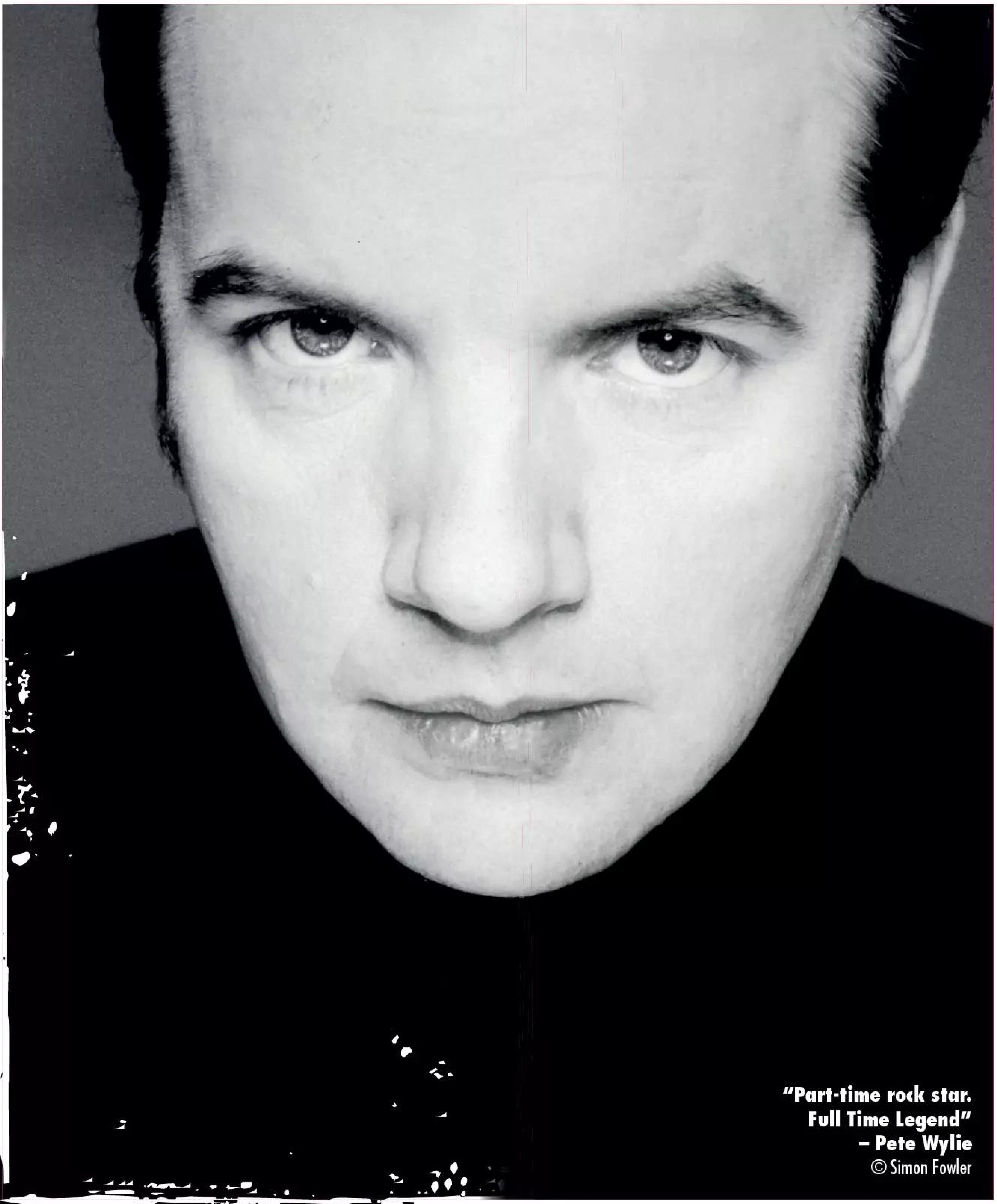
That passion for the effect music can have on people means it was doubly galling to Wylie that, during the 80s, he was sometimes dismissed as a ligger for enjoying the company of musicians.

The 'L' word is a tag Wylie raises himself, explaining he enjoys being sent old reviews by fans online, though they sometimes make him despair. "When I lived in London, I wasn't any different than when I'd see mates in Liverpool," he insists. "I had a fantastic time, hanging out with George Michael and meeting people I loved, like Keith Richards. I met Prince, which I wouldn't have done if I'd been in a pub in Kirby."

Wylie performs onstage at Rewind Scotland Festival in June 2022
© Getty



"Music has different neural triggers to me than most people" – Pete Wylie



"Part-time rock star. Full Time Legend" – Pete Wylie
© Simon Fowler

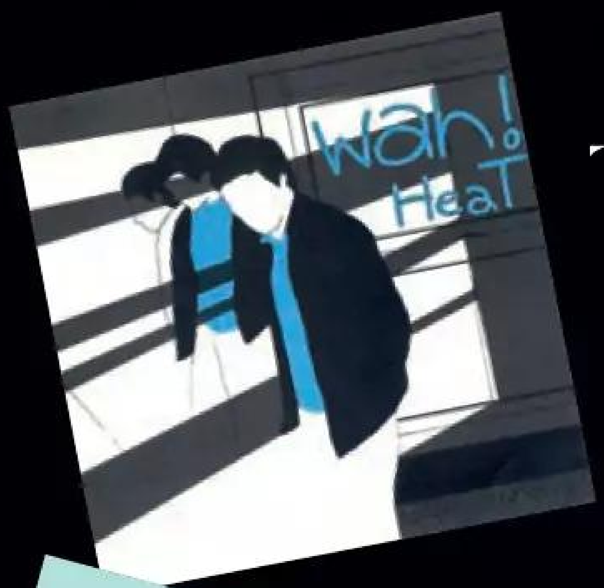
A FISHY TALE

One of Pete Wylie's most acclaimed collaborations was helping his then-partner, artist and campaigner Josie Jones, write the lyrics for 1990's cult dance protest song *Imperfect List.*

Produced by Cocteau Twins' Robin Guthrie and remixed by Andrew Weatherall, Jones' sole release under the name Big Hard Excellent Fish was a list of 64 aspects of modern life that the pair despised, from Bonnie Langford and Stock, Aitken Waterman to sexual harassment, acid rain and the poll tax, recited by Jones with an icy disdain.

"The reason I chose the title is two-fold," Wylie explains. "The word 'imperfect' has an obvious meaning, but 'imperfect' also means 'unfinished': it was an unfinished list, so that whoever's listening can add to it." Wylie emphasises that Jones – who died in 2015 – wrote most of the list. "I miss Josie every day," he states simply.

The single was written when Margaret Thatcher was coming to the end of her 11-year reign as Prime Minister, with the line "Fucking bastard Thatcher" delivered with particular contempt. In 2013, Wylie released a follow-up single of sorts in *The Day That Margaret Thatcher Dies.* "In *Imperfect List,* Thatcher stood for all the other sub-groups of Thatcher in power," sighs Wylie. "Music can positively affect you, but I wanted to write a song like that to encourage people to choose their own targets." What would be on Wylie's imperfect list in 2023? "Everything. It'd be a much longer single now."



MUSIC THAT MATTERS

Wylie's other big encounter with the mainstream arrived in 1986, when the title track of fourth album *Sinful* reached No.13. It sounded as ambitious as its aims, which Wylie rattles off as: "I wanted *Sinful* to have the power of The Clash, the sound of Giorgio Moroder and the passion of The Four Tops. It's got a Philip Glass section in it, too, which not many people realised. Philip Glass heard *Sinful* and apparently he didn't mind it at all. He decided not to sue me anyway, which is something."

If Wylie's musical output is small but perfectly formed, being signed to numerous record labels means it's taken until now to assemble his work together. Coinciding with a new tour starting in February, a first thorough compilation, *Teach Yself Wah!*, is being released.

Having studied French at university in 1976, as well as learning Latin and Ancient Greek ("I realise that goes against my ebullient image"), Wylie sees his music as something that can similarly be studied. "Most people only know bits about me," he muses. "There are indie heads who only know the early singles, then there's the fans of *The Story Of The Blues.* They're both only versions of me and there are a lot of holes to my story. I want people to have a fuller version of my story that gets rid of some of the clichés about me. I'm not saying: 'You must learn this.' It's more: 'Here you are, here's a focused selection, now make your own mind up.'"

The sleeve of *Teach Yself Wah!* is of a 1983 painting by Pete Townshend of Wylie in a sailor's cap, after the pair met on Janice Long's Radio 1 show. "Pete was both my guitar guru and my guru for writing pop songs that talked about something," he gushes. "Pete said in his book that I represent how Liverpool stands against the tide. He's still my biggest hero."

If Wah! haven't equalled The Who's status commercially, at least Wylie is still creating music that matters. He recites the lyrics of a new song, *I Am Neither,* about his status as neither cult act nor megastar. "If I'd been less successful, I'd be a brilliant cult figure and someone would have made a movie about me," smiles Wylie, whose Twitter bio states: "Part-time rock star". "If I'd been more successful, I'd be rich. And someone would have made a movie about that." Pete Wylie: one day, his life is going to make an excellent mem-wah. ■

● Pete Wylie And The Mighty Wah! tour from 2 February to 6 April 2024. The Best Of compilation *Teach Yself Wah!* will be released by Chrysalis on 2 February. See petewylie.com for full details.

THE BEST OF 2023

OUR PICK OF THE FINEST NEW ALBUMS, REISSUES, VARIOUS ARTIST COMPILATIONS AND BOOKS FROM ACROSS THE PAST 12 MONTHS

JOHN EARLS, MARK LINDORES AND STEVE HARNELL

NEW ALBUMS

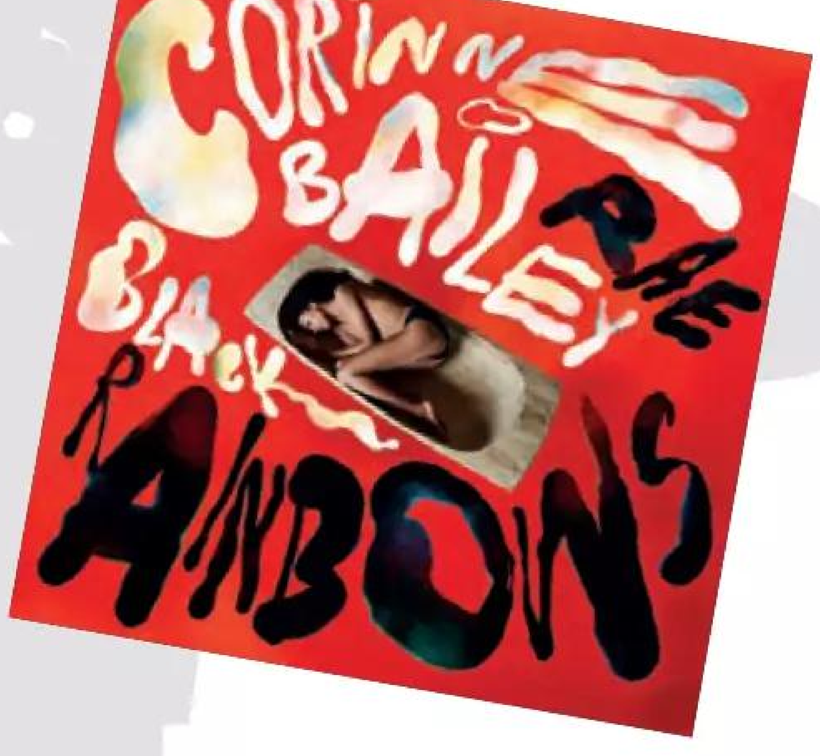
KYLIE GOES VIRAL, A SURPRISE NEW OMD ALBUM, DEPECHE RETURN AS A DUO AND MORE

1 KYLIE
TENSION (DARENOTE/BMG)
After loosely themed albums of country and disco, Kylie returned to mucking about and simply doing what felt right. As cheery as it was to have *Padam Padam* become a genuine chart-gobbling phenomenon, it was just one classic on a record that was stuffed with big moments. Comfortably in the top three best Kylie albums, while returning to pop that sounds an effortless breeze.

2 OMD
BAUHAUS STAIRCASE
(100%)
Six years after classic 'farewell' album *The Punishment Of Luxury*, new OMD music was a fantastic surprise, not least to OMD themselves. Powered by the boredom of lockdown, the duo's most explicitly political statement ripples with tension, big statements matched by bigger hooks. That it also features sumptuous ballads is testament to still being in love with every aspect of pop.

3 LLOYD COLE
ON PAIN (EARMUSIC)
Having experimented with synths for 20 years, Lloyd Cole managed to integrate that minimalism into his pop songwriting to devastating effect. The sombre, sparse material sounded like a lost Mark Hollis album, yet was offset by hilarious tales of Iggy 'n' Bowie's bromance and hedonistic wolves. In his early-60s, Cole unearthed a whole new seamy seam to mine.

4 CORINNE BAILEY RAE
BLACK RAINBOWS
(THIRTY TIGERS)
An album impossible not to fall in love with and equally hard to categorise, the elusive singer maintained her mystery on her first album in seven years, as listeners wondered: "How did you do *that*?"



Switching from intense garage punk to stargazing Princely jams, there were also ballads as blissful as her 2006 hit *Put Your Records On*, just to prove that she still could.

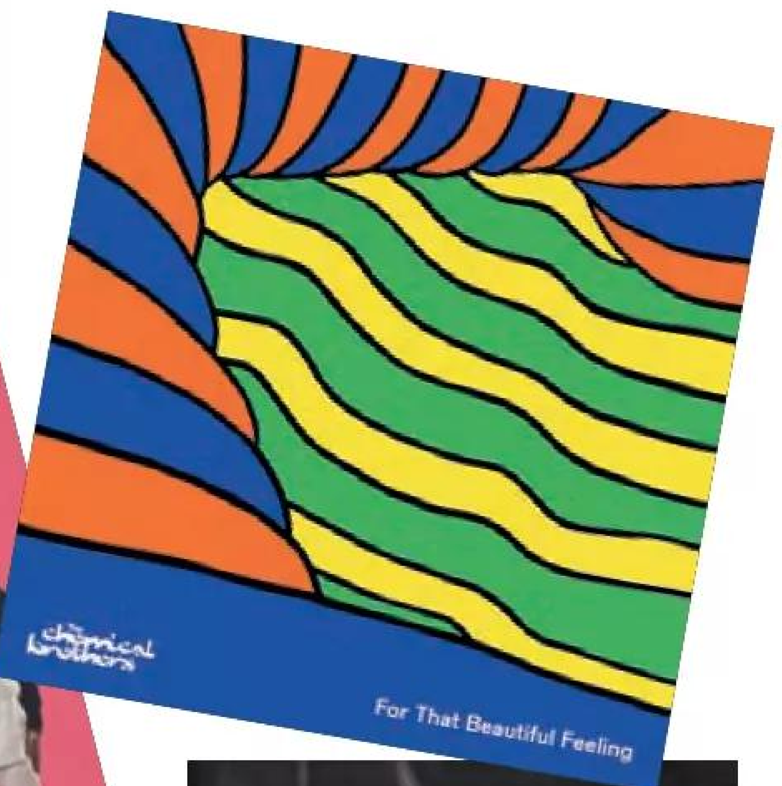
5 JESSIE WARE
THAT! FEELS GOOD! (EMI)
Joined by friends including Kylie and Aisling Bea on the title track, Jessie Ware returned from her cosy food podcast with her mum to delivering 50ft robo bangers with equal poise. Having quietly become one of our most maverick popstars, Ware's public cheeriness masks how she's now made five albums of lewd, raucous disco. The vintage sheen was underpinned by platinum songwriting.

6 DEPECHE MODE
MEMENTO MORI (SONY)
There were fitting tributes to Fletch on Depeche's first album without the glue who held Dave Gahan and Martin Gore together, not least mighty single of the year contender *Ghosts Again*. But the biggest tribute that the duo could pay their friend was to regain their mischief and love of pop on a playful, vital set facing a new future with their early spirit reimagined.

7 THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS
FOR THAT BEAUTIFUL FEELING (EMI)
The Chems' least successful album commercially deserved a far better response, for a record as intense and full-throttle as their live spectacle. Capable of going back to their earliest big beat excursions on *The Weight*, Tom and Ed also distilled their pop experience into the irresistible *Skipping Like A Stone*. Light on guests, heavy on wonder, still determined to invite everyone into their party.

8 THE LOTTERY WINNERS
ANXIETY REPLACEMENT THERAPY (MODERN SKY)
Part of a wave of independently released albums to gatecrash into No.1, the Mancs beat The National to the UK top spot with giant singalongs worthy of their communal, celebratory live shows. Thom Rylance's charm and vulnerability stood strong next to Shaun Ryder at his barking best on *Money*, plus you get one of Boy George's most beautiful vocals guesting on *Let Me Down*.

9 DURAN DURAN
DANSE MACABRE (TAPE MODERN/BMG)
For life, not just for Halloween, Duran Duran's mix of new songs, covers and reworked fan favourites barely needed the excuse of its spooky theme. At least it focused them into working at record speed, an energy palpable in the whirlwind *Black Moonlight*. *Confession In The Afterlife* must have Bryan Ferry seething jealously, and their Billie Eilish cover is equally grandiose.



10 HIFI SEAN AND DAVID McALMONT
HAPPY ENDING (PLASTIQUE)
More of a bright new dawn than an ending, David McAlmont found the perfect foil for his stratospheric voice in dance artist Hi-Fi Sean. Mixing blissed-out grooves, impassioned soul and futurist pop, the duo triumphed throughout, hopefully ready to make more magic together. Under his real name, Sean Dickson also fronted a reformed Soup Dragons for a majestic 2023.

AS CHEERY AS IT WAS TO HAVE PADAM PADAM BECOME A GENUINE CHART-GOBBLING PHENOMENON, IT WAS JUST ONE CLASSIC ON AN ALBUM STUFFED WITH BIG MOMENTS

COMPILATIONS

OUR FAVOURITE VARIOUS ARTIST COLLECTIONS OF 2023

1 YOUNG LIMBS RISE AGAIN
(EDSEL/DEMON)
As exemplified by The Sisters Of Mercy and The Cure, the dark side of 80s pop had just as much humour and, crucially, melodic power as any New Romantic fops. Based around the influential Batcave club, this 5CD 1982-85 set showcased how Goth – to use the term virtually all its artists shunned – grew in confidence and grandeur every week.

2 NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL EUROVISION SONG CONTEST (NOW)
Liverpool hosting Eurovision was the perfect excuse for Now to offer a definitive boxset of the contest's history. The big-hitters were here, but this 4CD collection excelled by offering joys barely known to even the competition's biggest devotees. Here is the perfect retort to anyone who still thinks of Eurovision's music as easily dismissed fluff. Douze points.

3 DISCO DISCHARGE PRESENTS BOX OF SIN
(DISCO DISCHARGE/DEMON)
Influential LGBTQ+ label Disco Discharge came strutting out of retirement to present 54 of the 80s' best gay club anthems. So much of mainstream 80s pop derived from this poppers-guzzling mayhem, twisting electronics, basslines and listeners into new and ingenious shapes. Far too much fun to be called 'educational', yet this 5CD set shows where it was going on first.

4 DANCE CRAZE
(CHRYSALIS)
The classic 2Tone films was reissued on Blu-Ray, director Joe Massot's idea of shooting from the bands' perspective bringing the sweaty mania to life better than most tour documentaries. Capturing The Specials at their height and Madness before they went fully pop, the film and accompanying expanded live album highlights the whole scene's stars perfectly.

5 NOW 12" 80s: 1981 (NOW)
Now's *Yearbook* series continued to delight, starting to explore beyond the 80s. Their themed *Eighties Dancefloor* compilations were a welcome addition. But possibly the best new move is bringing together all the 80s' best extended versions, year by year.

REISSUES

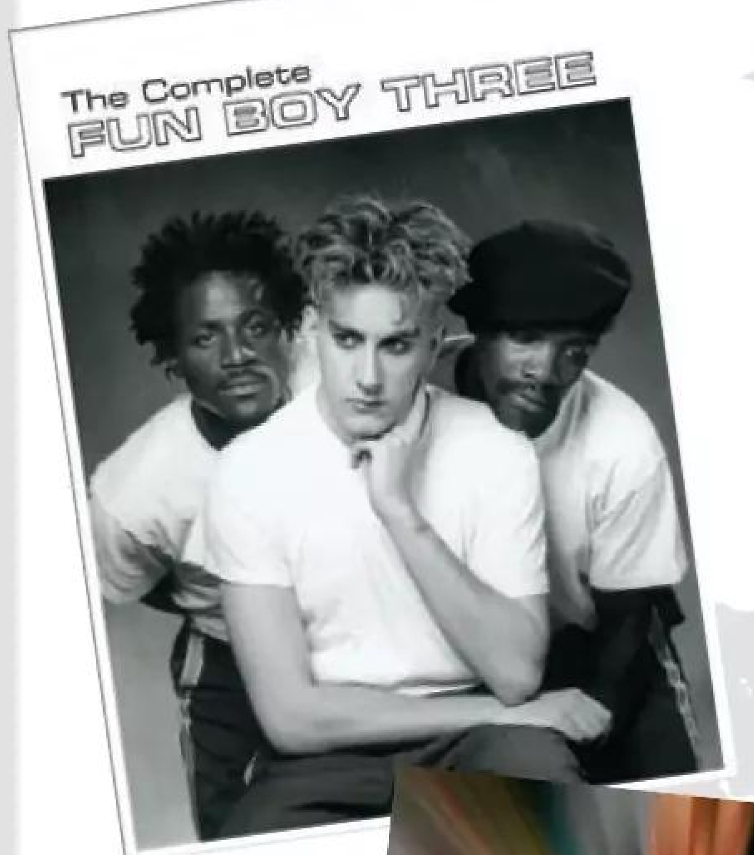
SOFT CELL'S CLASSIC DEBUT EXPANDED, PET SHOP BOYS' SINGLES COLLECTED AND A GEM OF A PRINCE BOXSET

1 PRINCE & THE NEW POWER GENERATION DIAMONDS AND PEARLS (NPG/WARNER)

Prince's team continue to set the gold standard for thoroughness in reissues. It helped that *Diamonds And Pearls* was Prince's most straight-up pop album – and that there were so many superb previously unreleased songs offering potential alternative visions for his new band. The New Power Generation are superb throughout the intimate Minneapolis homecoming show on the boxset's Blu-Ray, Prince at his peak... until the police arrived.

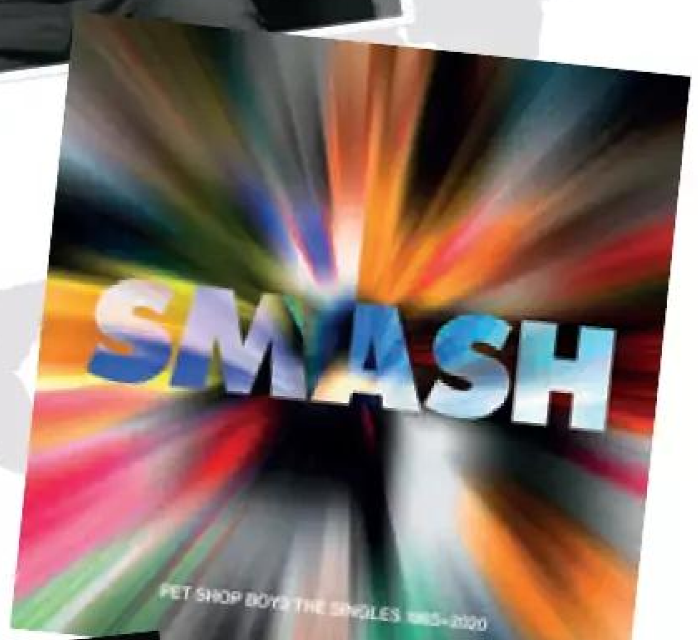
2 FUN BOY THREE THE COMPLETE (CHRYSALIS)

The Specials get the attention, but what Terry Hall did next is possibly his most undiluted vision. There's still nothing like the devilment of FB3's debut, while getting David Byrne to produce the follow-up is hardly more mainstream. A cavalcade of apocalyptic partying and mighty percussion, they couldn't last. This boxset lives up to the 'Complete' tag in offering all their mordant glee.



3 PET SHOP BOYS SMASH (PARLOPHONE)

Accompanying their seemingly endless hits world tour, here was a no-frills package of every single, one after the other, as a test to see how long it's possible to remain completely giddy. Tennant/Lowe have been pop's finest statement for decades, refusing to let the quality drop. As if *Smash* wasn't enough joy, their previously rare dance album *Relentless* finally got a proper release 30 years on. Whatever next?



4 SOFT CELL NON-STOP EROTIC CABARET (UMC/MERCURY-EMI)

A boxset matching the original album's maverick spirit, Soft Cell's debut was overhauled in a more inventive way than most reissues. Sure, there were the expected B-sides, 12" mixes and vintage radio sessions. But you also got a ton of new remixes and a live album of how these songs of prime disco paranoia sound from 21st century Soft Cell: slick yet still sick.

5 DE LA SOUL 3FT HIGH AND RISING (CHRYSALIS)

After decades of wrangling over royalties and sample clearances, it was beautiful to hear the Daisy Age innovators finally land on streaming, allowing a new generation to investigate their first six albums, also back on vinyl and CD. After so many disputes with Tommy Boy Records, extras were too much to ask for. Who cares, when you could finally hear their majesty officially again.

6 NEW ORDER SUBSTANCE 1987 (WARNER)

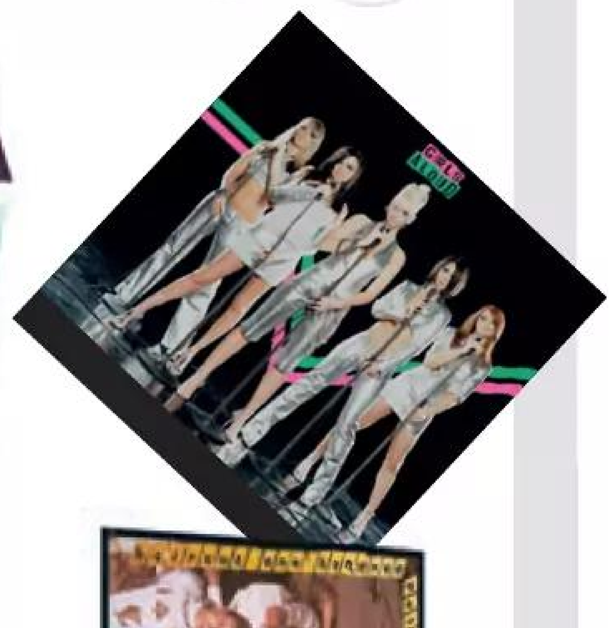
Featuring both the all-time greatest 'We need a new song for the Best Of' in *True Faith* and a contender for finest B-side in *1963*, New Order's first singles comp is a classic, partly because it finally assembled so many top drawer non-album hits. The sensible reissue added a great live singles concert. Now, how about an equally comprehensive volume two?

7 WHAM! THE SINGLES: ECHOES FROM THE EDGE OF HEAVEN (SONY)

Netflix's simply-titled *Wham!* documentary was so moving in documenting George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley's brief career, it overshadowed how the accompanying compilation was a simple yet effective singles set that finally superseded *The Final*. Ridgeley explained to *Classic Pop* how Wham! was a friendship set to music, and these joyous hits showed that to perfection. Hopefully, more Wham! reissues will follow.

8 GIRLS ALOUD SOUND OF THE UNDERGROUND (UMC/POLYDOR)

The reissue of Girls Aloud's debut was an overdue thorough document of how the group – and noughties pop in general – deserved to have more than just their hits reassessed. An excellent 3CD (and first time on vinyl) package highlights how many great remixes and B-sides were going on. Fingers crossed more of their albums will get the same treatment before their comeback arena tour.

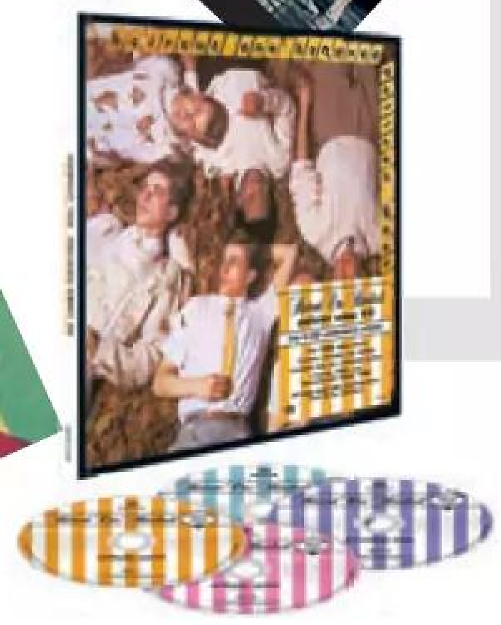


9 KIRSTY MacCOLL SEE THAT GIRL (UMC)

An 8CD boxset of every Kirsty MacColl single, the thoughtfully assembled extras included a disc of collaborations and full concerts, topped by the previously unreleased 1983 album *Real*, an energetic and inventive New Wave LP whose enforced stay in the vaults was just baffling. That MacColl's music remains so invigorating makes it even more poignant that we were denied more from her.

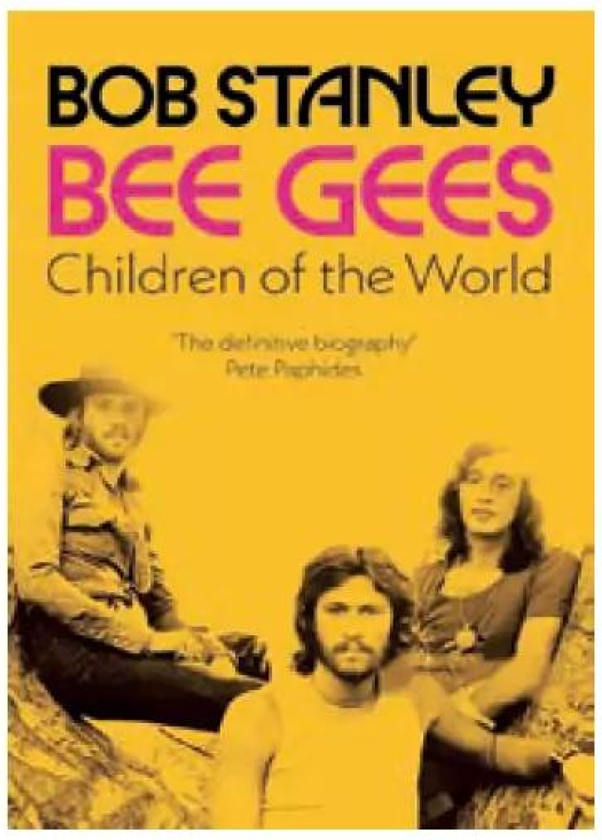
10 HAIRCUT 100 PELICAN WEST (DEMON)

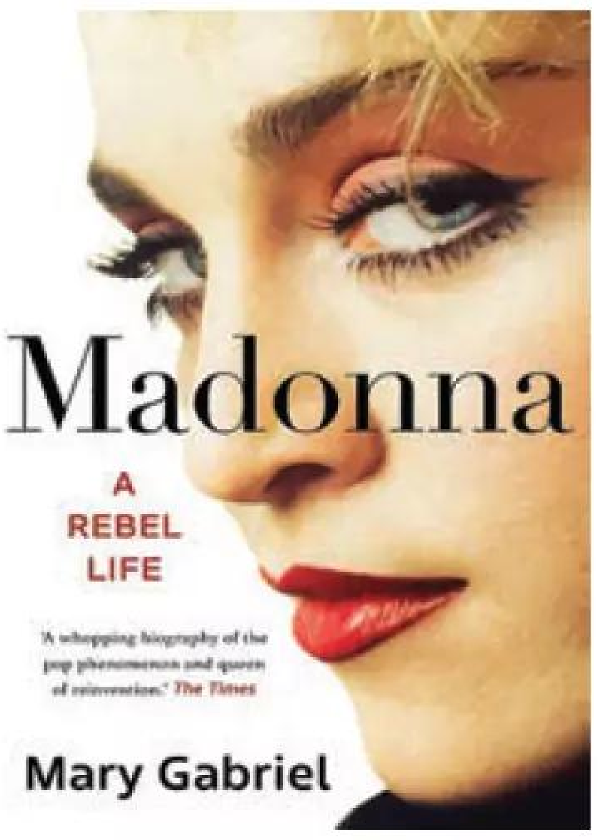
Including both a live LP and the demos of their unfinished second album with Nick Heyward, this lovingly assembled boxset of Haircut 100's debut not only hinted at how great they could have become, it helped lead to a reunion tour. They told *Classic Pop* how a new album might yet follow. Question is, can they still be this hectic over 40 years on?

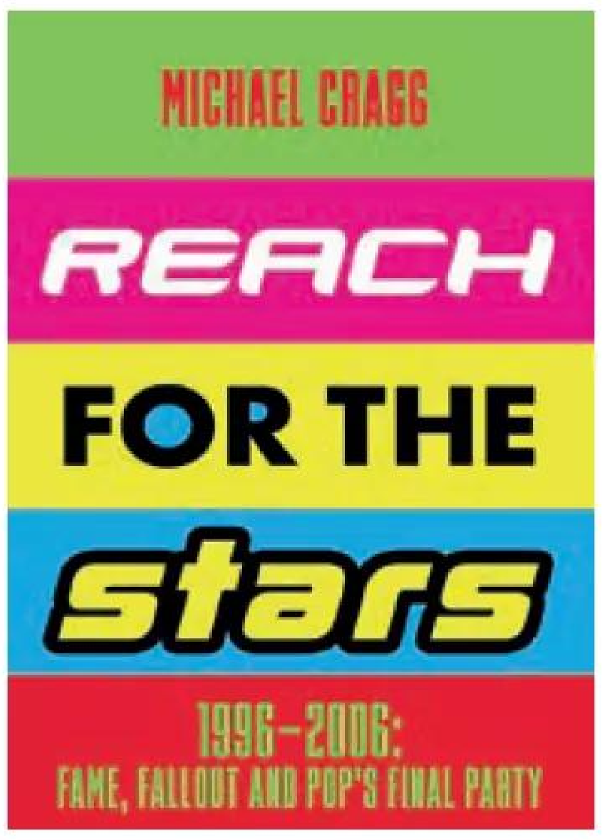


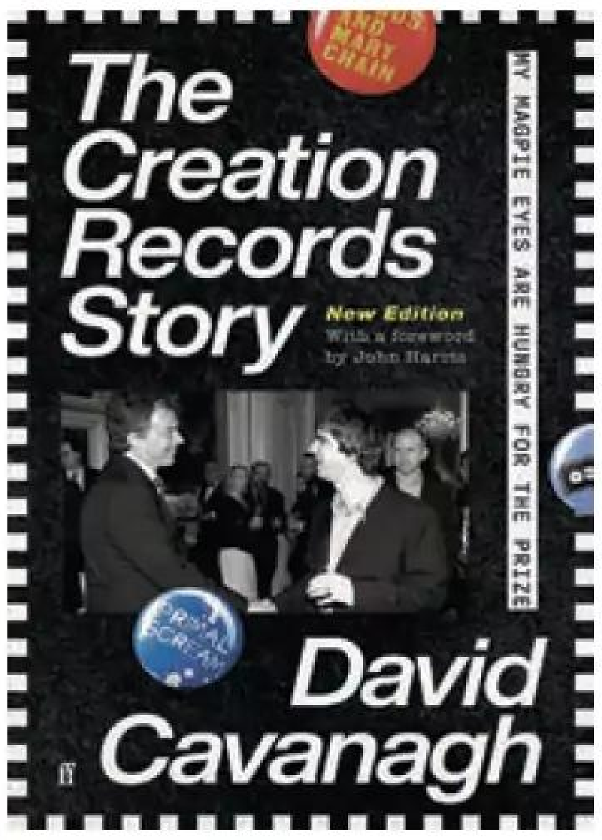
BOOKS

2023'S MUST-READS IN AUTOBIOGRAPHIES, BIOGRAPHIES AND NON-FICTION









1 BEE GEES: CHILDREN OF THE WORLD
BOB STANLEY
(NINE EIGHT BOOKS)
The story of pop's most successful underdogs recounted in meticulous detail. Bob Stanley's superbly crafted tribute to the Gibb brothers and the experimentalism of their remarkable discography doesn't so much ask for, it demands respect and re-evaluation of the group's work. Long overdue, the Bee Gees finally have the biography that they deserve.

2 MADONNA: A REBEL LIFE
MARY GABRIEL
(CORONET)
Celebrating the pop icon's 40th year in music, Mary Gabriel casts a critical eye over Madonna's full career, examining the singer's role in pop culture, feminism and sexual politics. At close to 900 pages, *A Rebel Life* focuses on the art and treats her work with the gravitas it deserves – and emerges as the best Madonna biography to date.

3 REACH FOR THE STARS: 1996-2006, FAME, FALLOUT AND POP'S LAST PARTY
MICHAEL CRAGG
(NINE EIGHT BOOKS)
This must-read oral history of turn-of-the-millennium pop celebrates the likes of Spice Girls, Girls Aloud and S Club, with Cragg scratching behind the veneer to the often-ugly side of the scene's shiny, happy people.

4 THE CREATION RECORDS STORY: MY MAGPIE EYES ARE HUNGRY FOR THE PRIZE
DAVID CAVANAGH (FABER)
Compiled from hundreds of interviews with artists, employees, journalists, producers, fans and critics, the late David Cavanagh paints a rounded portrait of Creation and its founder Alan McGee. The definitive story of not only a label, but also an exposé of the machinations of the indie scene

5 KARMA
BOY GEORGE
(BLINK)
In Boy George's new (third) memoir, the pop icon looks back over his colourful and turbulent life, documenting his highs and lows, supported by a cast of hilarious characters. Gloriously gossipy and self-effacing, *Karma* namedrops unapologetically, casually exposing egos and shattering pop's glittery veneer. A fascinating glimpse at the man behind the make-up.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED, TEARJERKING RETURNS AND DEEP DIVE BOXSETS – *CLASSIC POP* EDITOR STEVE HARNELL PICKS OUT HIS PERSONAL SONIC HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PAST YEAR

I can't ever see a day when we grow tired of genuine surprises here at *Classic Pop*, and the last 12 months saw its fair share of unexpected moments.

Leading the charge was the wonderful return of Blur. While I'm rather fond of the smash-and-grab informality of 2015's *Magic Whip* whose release equally blindsided fans, there was something more coherent, consistent and considered about this year's *The Ballad Of Darren*. With their new cuts justifiably earning their keep in the band's 2023 festival sets and stadium shows, Damon Albarn wasn't the only one reduced to tears by the emotional impact of their comeback.

Also tugging at the heartstrings were Depeche Mode who returned with *Memento Mori*, their first studio album since the sad death of founder member Andy Fletcher. The band are always a dependable enormodome live act, but *Memento Mori* came with a few pleasing twists – not least The Psychedelic Furs' Richard Butler's introduction as co-writer with Martin Gore on four tracks, providing a new lyrical direction and fresh impetus.

The adventurousness of Corinne Bailey Rae's *Black Rainbows* was a joy to behold as she pinballed between genres with a giddy abandon, while Gaz Coombes' *Turn The Car Around* was packed with quality tunes.

Equally entertaining was Duran Duran's loosely Halloween-themed *Danse Macabre*, the band brilliantly reinventing Billie Eilish's *Bury A Friend* and hitting the dancefloor for a take on disco classic *Supernature*.

The Prince estate continue to lead the way with their expanded boxsets. This year it's the turn of my own favourite Prince album, 1991's *Diamonds And Pearls*, to get the deluxe edition treatment. A stunning package with a beautifully illustrated hardback book, Blu-ray and comprehensive extras meant it more than held its own with the equally exhaustive *Sign O' The Times* set from 2020.

Meanwhile, a-ha took a deep dive into their classic album debut *Hunting High And Low* and Haircut 100 did the same for their own *Pelican West*.

As a catch-all genre boxset, *Now Presents Classic Soul* was pretty much unbeatable. The 5LP 85-track vinyl collection was an incredible celebration of 60s and 70s soul and R&B and, as you'll see elsewhere this issue, the Now brand has outdone itself yet again with its new Disco boxset.

And Manchester's finest continued to shine, New Order served up a must-have *Low-life* boxset and *Substance 1987* reissue, Johnny Marr's best of *Spirit Power* showcased his consistency as a solo artist, Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds shone with *Council Skies* and The Chemical Brothers continued to push the envelope on the thumping *For That Beautiful Feeling*.

Finally, a special mention for the gorgeous LP reissue of The Breeders seminal *Last Splash*.

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REVIEWS

Peter Gabriel's long-awaited 10th studio album *i/o* leads the way in our new releases section – we review it on page 79

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RATINGS

★★★★★ EXCELLENT
★★★★ VERY GOOD
★★★ GOOD
★★ PATCHY
★ POOR

THE HOT LIST

WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT AT CLASSIC POP TOWERS THIS MONTH

STEVE HARNELL

© Rocky Schenck

1

1 EELS
EELS SO GOOD: ESSENTIAL EELS, VOL 2
A follow-up to 2008's opening volume, *Eels So Good* spans the band's next 15 years and seven studio albums. Boasting hits such as *Fresh Blood* and *That Look You Gave That Guy*, new favourites from 2020's *Earth To Dora*, as well as three previously unreleased songs, the compilation also features five tracks being pressed to vinyl for the first time, including *Royal Pain* from *Shrek The Third* and the *Yes Man* soundtrack's *Man Up*.

2 THE LOVELESS
MEET THE LOVELESS
Marc Almond in garage rock shock! Yep, the Soft Cell frontman is ditching the synths as he presents his new project The Loveless – a covers band featuring former Sigue Sigue Sputnik guitarist Neal X, Iggy Pop's touring rhythm section of Matt Hector and Ben Ellis, plus keyboard player James Beaumont. Debut album *Meet The*

2

Loveless includes their delinquent take on tunes by the likes of The Kinks, The Shadows Of Knight, Smoky and – with Sex Pistol Glen Matlock on board – Bo Diddley.

3 DEAD OR ALIVE
STILL SPINNIN':
THE SINGLES COLLECTION
It's the DOA motherlode – an exhaustive limited edition 27CD boxset, which collects the group's singles including selected licenses that Pete Burns and Steve Coy made with other record

3

4

labels. Newly remastered, each CD comes in replica mini-sleeves from across DOA's domestic and international releases.

4 RACHEL SAGE & HOWARD JONES
I MADE A CASE
The 80s synth-pop legend teams up with singer-songwriter Rachel Sage for *I Made A Case*, which features on her new album *The Other Side*. Sage says: "It was an enormous honour to have Howard involved in recording the duet version, and he couldn't have been any more encouraging or positive

5

throughout the process. I'm still pinching myself that one of my very favourite artists and humans agreed to collaborate with me on such a delicate ballad and was so protective of the song as well."

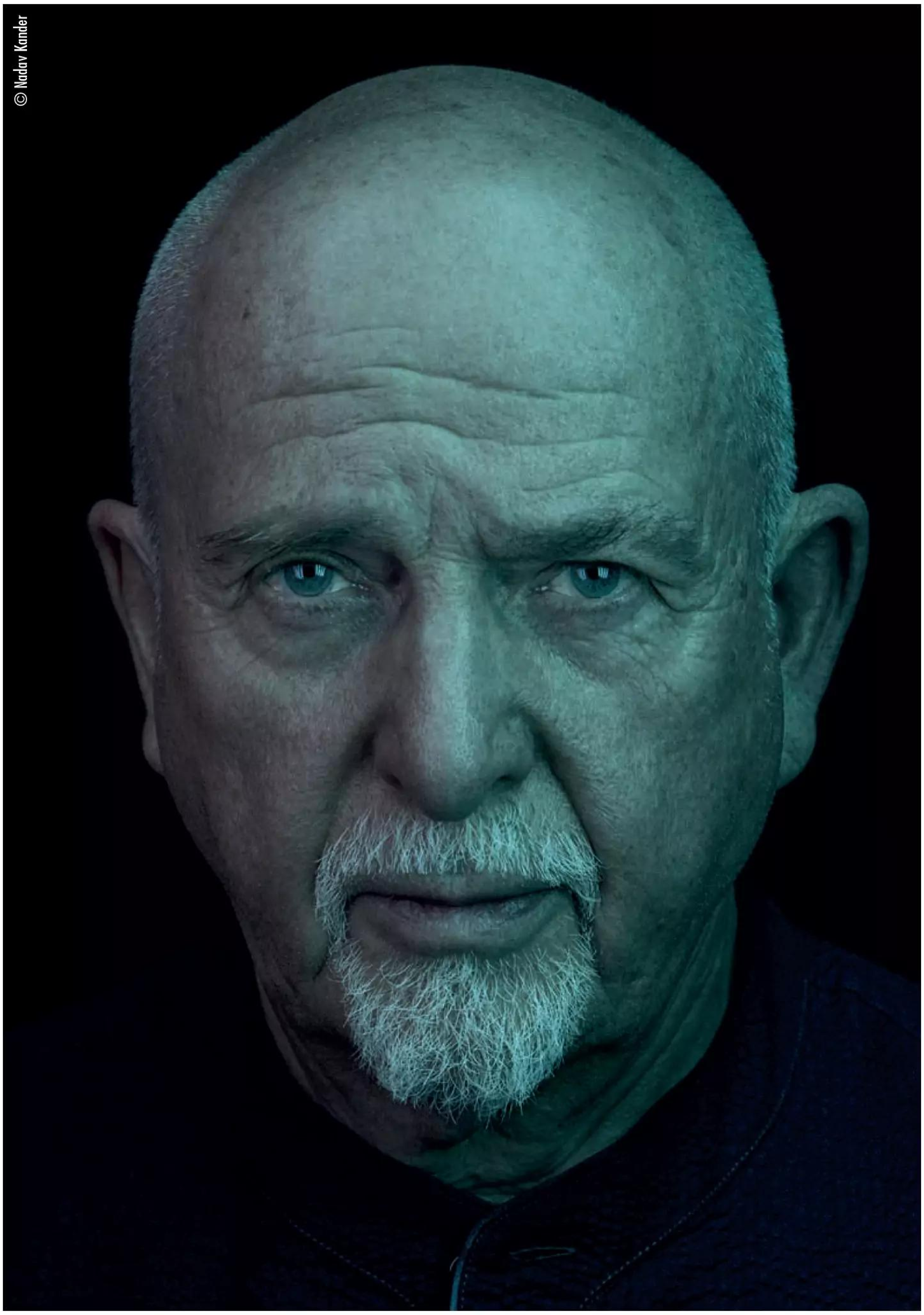
5 NEW MODEL ARMY
UNBROKEN
Produced by Tchad Blake, New Model Army return with studio LP No.16 on 26 January promising the "rhythmic punch of their earlier days along with the emotional sophistication and wisdom of mature men addressing the world and their place in it today."

PETER GABRIEL
i/o

REAL WORLD

★★★½

ONE OF ROCK'S MOST SINGULAR TALENTS PLOUGHS HIS OWN FURROW ONCE MORE ON A REFLECTIVE 10TH STUDIO LP. BUT IS IT WORTH THE WAIT OF TWO DECADES?



© Nadav Kander

If Peter Gabriel's first album of new material in more than 20 years hasn't arrived with quite the fanfare you'd expect, that's because all its songs are already out in the wild, the former Genesis frontman having released a new track on every full moon of the year. Why? Because he's Peter Gabriel, and he does that sort of thing.

As you might expect from an artist knocking on the door of 74, it's the quieter moments of autumnal reflection that prove the highlights on *i/o*. *Playing For Time* is a lushly romantic, Randy Newman-inspired meditation on age and memory, while the gorgeous *Love Can Heal* pulses and shimmers like a modern *Mercy Street*, its swooning cello and softly sighing chorus of female vocals (including Gabriel's daughter Melanie) furnishing the album with its most transcendental moment of beauty. The sparse, plaintive *So Much*, meanwhile, plays like a spiritual successor to *Here Comes The Flood*, via The Blue Nile, with its ruminations on mortality ("The body stiffens, tires and aches, in its wrinkled blotchy skin/ With each decade more camouflage, for the wild-eyed child within") recalling Leonard Cohen's twilight years.

But let's not write the obituaries just yet: as his recent arena shows have demonstrated, Gabriel is in energetically rude health, and *i/o* finds him as intellectually curious as ever – subjects under discussion this time out range from 18th century social theorist Jeremy Bentham to the roots of terrorism and "the interconnectedness of everything" – while proving he's still more than capable of getting his groove on.

Of the latter, the nearest we get to a full-on *Sledgehammer* moment is *Road To Joy* – the uplifting tale of a coma patient slowly returning to life, one sense at a time – while *Olive Tree*, with its brassy, samba-ish chorus, is the record's most explicit expression of its creator's lifelong love affair with world music.

Elsewhere, there's plenty of that metallic, mid-tempo machine funk Gabriel's been routinely pressing into service since the days of *I Don't Remember*. At times, this can feel formulaic: the plodding *Panopticom* and *The Court* remain a baffling pair of lead singles to announce the *i/o* project. But it all adds up to a cohesive whole that is beautifully played by a sizeable cast of collaborators including Brian Eno, the New Blood Orchestra and the Soweto Gospel Choir, while Gabriel's husky light tenor is as silkily seductive as ever.

The double-CD offers two different mixes from Mark 'Spike' Stent and Tchad Blake: Gabriel describes the former as a 'painter' and the latter as a 'sculptor', though non-audiophiles might struggle to discern much difference. Each song also comes with a specially-commissioned artwork from the likes of Cornelia Parker and Ai Weiwei – so if you're planning on just sticking with that Spotify playlist you've spent the year compiling, you won't be getting *quite* the full picture. **Paul Kirkley**

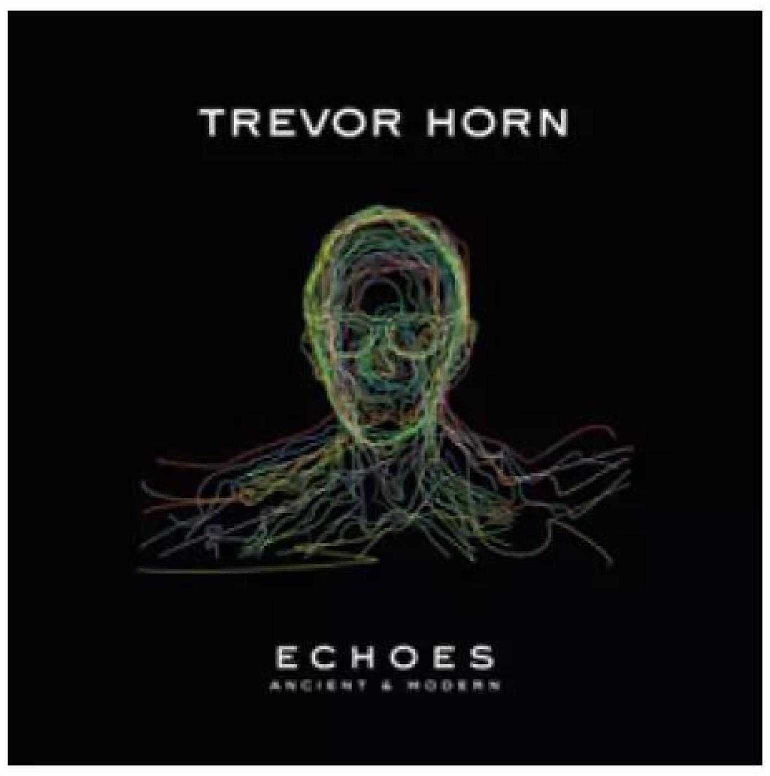
TREVOR HORN
ECHOES: ANCIENT & MODERN

DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON

★★★

Look, we'd all like Trevor Horn to still be spending six weeks perfecting the bass on a revolutionary band's debut single. Trevor is now 74, though. It's not going to happen. Even a perfectionist like Horn has his limits, and he now seems to spend his working life accepting jobs on the basis of "Is this going to be a lark?"

After working with Robbie Williams, All Saints and Tony Hadley on the self-explanatory



Reimagines The Eighties in 2019, Horn now oversees a broader range of covers with a fairly similar cast of singers. Marillion's Steve Hogarth is back, his restrained power suitable for an ambient *Drive*.

Of course Horn's favourite singer Seal is also here, having a very lovely time indeed bringing a tropicália mood to Joe Jackson's *Steppin' Out*.

The overriding mood on *Echoes* is stately and graceful. If that means Horn appears to be trolling adherents of the filth and mayhem of the original *Relax* by getting Toyah to happily croon over a new just-so glide, think of it instead as a fresh remix. That'll be Mr Toyah, Robert Fripp, doing its precise guitar. Him and Horn know what they're doing.

A similar pixieish mood lurks in Iggy Pop's drawling *Personal Jesus*. Trevor Horn is far too

© Spitfire Audio

classy to generally bother with dreary old rock music, but he can get his hands dirty when he wants, don't you know?

There are times when *Echoes* really is trying it on. Lady Blackbird deserves a more imaginative song to tackle than *Slave To The Rhythm* on autopilot, while Jack Lukeman's *Smells Like Teen Spirit* is closer to Take That's cover than the Nirvana original.

Pile those up against Marc Almond getting stuck right into Pat Benatar's *Love Is A Battlefield* or Horn himself singing an elegiac *Avalon* as proof that Trevor can still work the studio like nobody else.

It's absolutely not going to trouble *The Lexicon Of Love* or *Seal* on Horn's CV. Yet there's plenty going on here that's as much fun for the listener as it is for Trevor Horn. **John Earls**

EMF
THE BEAUTY AND THE CHAOS

EMF

★★★½

Back as occasional tourers since 2012, 2020's boxset *From Us To You* also drew attention to how much more EMF had going on in addition to *Unbelievable*.

The boxset seemed to focus the band themselves, who released their first album for 27 years in 2022's *Go Go Sapiens*. Barely a year later, that's been improved on, at least in part by returning to work with Ralph Jezzard, producer of EMF's first two albums.

Although Jezzard has recently been in semi-retirement, he brings

a familiar crunch to first single *Hello People* and *Red Flags*, the latter an especially sweaty mosh redolent of EMF's rave roots.

That illicit thrill is most explicit in the standout *Reach For The Lasers*. James Atkin recites a list of dance pioneers from Lindy Layton to Four Tet over spring-heeled beats that kick harder than EMF have any right to after so long. Its repeated climax of "Andy Weatherall! Andy Weatherall!" is oddly moving, too.

In their years out, guitarist Ian Dench became a successful songwriter for Florence + The Machine and Shakira. Dench co-wrote three songs on Beyoncé's 2008 album *I Am Sasha Fierce* and won an Ivor Novello Award in the same year, so he financially doesn't *need* to be in EMF anymore. The whipsmart carnival groove in *The Day The Music Died* would be massive if Beyoncé sang it. Frankly, Ms Fierce can do one: James Atkin's vocals are

remarkably unaltered 30 years on, still saucer-eyed with wonder.

Not even a writer as gifted as Dench can make EMF's ballads any more convincing than the *Schubert Dip* days: *Lookout Mountain* is hopelessly gauche and the first half of *Do It Again* should have been binned off before it eventually gets going.

Still, it's time to get the glowsticks out of storage for EMF's successful rave-up revival. Even third album guest Stephen Fry is back for *The Beauty And The Chaos*, doing a speech on a remix of *Hello People* for the deluxe edition. To paraphrase Fry: damn it, Marjorie, it's good to have EMF back. **JE**

UB40
UB45

SHOESTRING

★★★

DESPITE THEIR ONGOING ISSUES WITH YOU-KNOW-WHO, UB40 ARE BACK WITH A CELEBRATORY SET OF REWORKED CLASSICS, FRESH COVERS AND A CLUTCH OF NEW MATERIAL

It's fair to say there's still no love lost between UB40 and Ali Campbell's offshoot. Press for the band's 21st studio effort has been keen to remind us there's still "all but one of the surviving founder members in its line-up," while also appearing to throw shade by referencing the youthfulness of new singer Matt Doyle. A further claim about "the indomitable spirit of brotherhood" almost seems like a sarcastic joke.

And yet it's Ali's incarnation, sadly now without the late Astro, that arguably most fans have gravitated towards. While the latter's *Unprecedented* LP reached No.8 in the UK charts last year, the original UB40's 2021 reimagining of 1985's *Baggariddim*, only peaked at a less than stellar No.137.

Ever-presents Robin Campbell, Earl Falconer, Norman Hassan and Jimmy Brown will no doubt be hoping to rectify this with part-alternative hits collection, part-new album *UB45*.

Unlike its similarly themed

predecessor, the majority of its seven re-recordings will already be familiar to even the most casual listener. But, while intended as a celebration of UB40's 45 years in action, it doesn't actually go beyond 1990's *Kingston Town*, instead largely focusing on the era when they were more synonymous with politically and socially-conscious reggae than pop-oriented covers.

Of course, we still get their first chart-topper, *Red Red Wine*, unfortunately still the musical equivalent of a persistent hangover. Thankfully, time has been kinder to 1980 debut single *Food For Thought*, essentially a *Do They Know It's Christmas?* prototype, and *King*, its curious double A-side in which the group channel a disapproving Martin Luther King from beyond the grave. There's also now an added poignancy to miscarriage-of-justice protest song *Tyler*, as the eponymous death row inmate has only recently been released.

Doyle, formerly of one-time UB40 support act Kioko, proves to be a solid replacement for the recently retired Duncan Campbell: the fact his childhood car journeys were soundtracked by *Labour Of Love* perhaps explains why he often resembles you-know-who.

However, there's inevitably nothing here to match the originals, with *Cherry Oh Baby* and *Sing Our Own Song*, in particular, hampered by lumpen, demo-like productions.

Of the five newly composed offerings, only Commonwealth Games anthem *Champion* is worthy of a medal. Meanwhile, summery renditions of Brenton Wood's *Gimme Little Sign* and Bill Withers' *Hope She'll Be Happier* prove that UB40 still have an ear for great covers material.

A mixed bag, then, and one unlikely to build any bridges. But there's enough of the old spirit shown here to back up the gang's insistence that they're the real deal. **Jon O'Brien**

REVIEWS

THE KILLERS
REBEL DIAMONDS

EMI

★★★★

Announced at relatively short notice in November, by their standards The Killers' new Best Of is an oddly muted release.

The reason seems simple: despite recent singles *Your Side Of Town* and *Spirit* being The Killers' finest pop moments since *The Man* (borrowing heavily from New Order and Underworld respectively), Brandon Flowers has said that he's abandoned what was meant to be their accompanying album, because he no longer feels convincing as a pop singer. Instead, Flowers wants to focus on mining the more introspective, personally meaningful side he felt flourished on previous LP, *Pressure Machine*.

While Flowers is to be applauded for his honesty, it's also frustrating for anyone who believes *Pressure Machine* was too in thrall to Bruce Springsteen and lacked the colour of The Killers' pop side.

© Todd Weaver

Arriving 20 years since *Hot Fuss* and a decade after previous singles compilation *Direct Hits*, *Rebel Diamonds* is a decent stopgap while Flowers and sole constant companion Ronnie Vannucci work out what they want The Killers to be next.

In fairness, a pop/Bruce inner turmoil has been present from the start, when Flowers thought the admittedly wonderful *All These Things That I've Done* would be their song to still hang around the charts 20 years later, rather than *Mr Brightside*. *Sam's Town*'s hits *When You Were Young* and *Read My Mind* were more Meat Loaf than The Boss,

but showed Flowers was never going to just mine his Pet Shop Boys and Blur leanings.

Roughly split between pop and depth since, the singles after *Direct Hits* still sounded like hits until the monochrome *Quiet Town*. If they don't have the instant familiarity of *Somebody Told Me*, then *Caution* and *Dying Breed* show Flowers was still having fun being huge. Maybe pulling out of pop is just a midlife crisis. If this really is it for The Killers as grandiose showmen, at least it was fun while it lasted. **JE**

JOE JACKSON
PRESENTS MAX CHAMPION IN 'WHAT A RACKET!'

EARMUSIC

★★★½

Since his 17th album *Rain* in 2008, Joe Jackson has released a Duke Ellington tribute record, a compilation of four EPs related to specific cities and an LP recorded in one day in Boise, Idaho, because that's where his latest tour happened to end.

Jackson, then, is one of the few musicians for whom a covers album of an obscure turn-of-the-century music hall performer can be considered business as usual. Max Champion was wrongly

assumed to be related to Harry Champion, the more successful music hall turn whose songs included *Boiled Beef And Carrots* and *Any Old Iron* – yet whose real surname was Crump.

Max is sadly believed to have died during combat in World War I. His songs languished in obscurity ever since, until a dozen began circulating in 2014 on sheet music in Belgium – where Champion was stationed – and Malta, the subject of the riotous *Monty Mundy*.

An inherently curious cult performer like Jackson was bound to be intrigued by Champion's story, and he fell in love with his prescient songs. "Sometimes, it's almost as if Max is speaking from the London of the early 20th century directly to us in the early 21st," commented Jackson, on staging an orchestral performance of Champion's songs in 2019.

He's right: most obviously in *Health And Safety* but also in the PE-shunning *The Sporting Life* and in the karmic shrug of *Worse Things Happen At Sea*, Champion's satire comfortably holds up.

Although he grew up in Hampshire, spent his most famous years in New York and now lives in Berlin, Jackson sounds a natural inhabiting a cheeky post-Victorian Cockney. He barrels along in the trouser-dropping whizz-bang farces of *Why, Why, Why?* and *The Bishop And The Actress*, sweeping up the listener with his garrulous charm, before easing into the more natural melancholia of *Never So Nice In The Morning*.

It's another niche concern for Jackson, but a racket that is acted out to perfection. **JE**

BLACK GRAPE
ORANGE HEAD

DGAFF

★★★★

Right. Can everyone stop taking Shaun Ryder for granted and pay attention to him again, please? True, Ryder has been a reliably genial constant presence on reality TV ever since first appearing on *I'm A Celebrity* in 2010.

In among numerous other roles from ghost hunting to *Gogglebox*, Ryder released his proper debut solo album *Visits From Future Technology* in 2021: not perfect, but its single *Mumbo Jumbo* served notice that Shaun could still whip out loping funk from the *Hallelujah* school.

Now comes this wonderful collection, its widescreen dusty dub and vintage soul horns evidence that Ryder is up for learning new tricks. *Orange Head* is his first album since he was diagnosed with ADHD, and he's been a surprisingly reflective authority on what the condition's effects can be.

If Ryder is calmer in his outlook, it allows him to be more confident about when to dish out the chaos. Yes, Happy Mondays fans deserve a new album. But, since getting clean, Ryder has always seemed happiest with Kermit in Black Grape. This is the culmination of their mischief: if it's not *quite* as monumental as the first side of *It's Great When You're Straight... Yeah!*, it's actually more consistent.

They're helped by producers Mike Buckley and Vince Chiarito. Previously members of soul cult singer Charles Bradley's band, they bring authenticity to the horns and ferocious bass powering under Ryder at his most teasing and Kermit at his shamanic best.

© Paul Husband

The Stax vibe of the *Pimp Wars* single is matched by *Self Harm* and *Quincy*, the latter a glorious romp where Ryder's enigmatic monologue is evidence why Tony Wilson called him our greatest modern-day poet. Ever wanted to hear Ryder take on tropicália? Head to *Button Eyes*. It's magnificent.

Orange Head isn't perfect: *Panda* is such a *Fools Gold* rip-off, it must be an in-joke. But, if Ryder had kept himself hidden since *Uncle Dysfunktional* and suddenly re-emerged with this, it would be awed rave reviews everywhere. Just because he likes to mess about, don't stop Ryder and his most effective lieutenant from being justly feted. **JE**

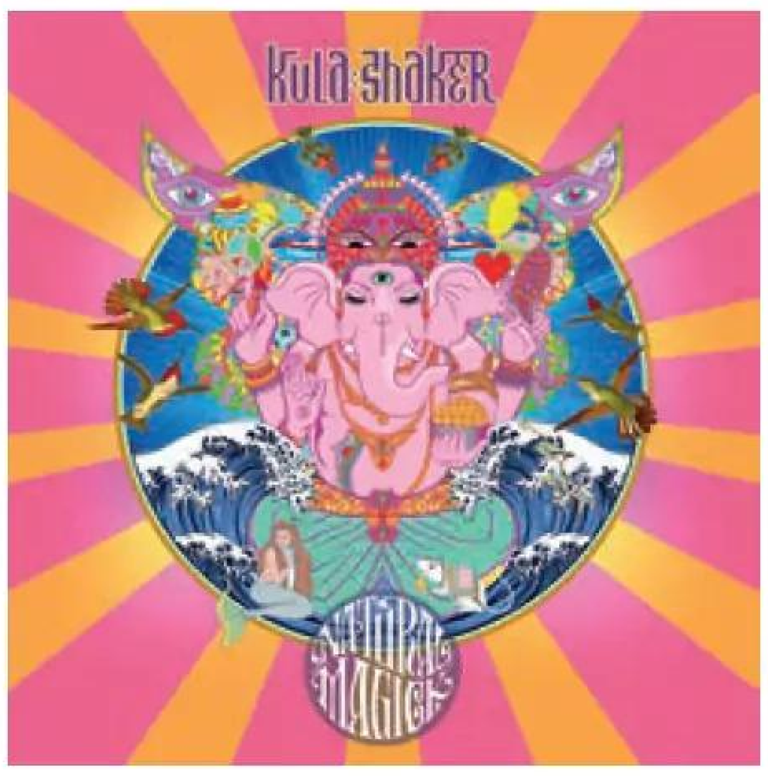
KULA SHAKER
NATURAL MAGICK

STRANGE FOLK

★★★

With songs titled *Gaslighting*, *Idontwannapaymytaxes* and *F-Bombs*, Kula Shaker's first album with their complete original line-up since 1999's *Peasants, Pigs And Astronauts* threatens to offer incoherent nonsense about the MSM from the off.

Sure enough, while *Gaslighting* is a lively opener in the *Hey Dude* vein, those other two songs derail the album entirely for six minutes. Crispian Mills is furious that his taxes are being used "to pay for World War III", while *F-Bombs* is essentially Culture Club's *The War Song* only with *actual swearing*, to show just how ruddy cross Mills is. It won't alter the Israel/Palestine conflict.



Both should have been left in the rehearsal room, and hopefully won't overshadow what generally returns Kula Shaker to their early deft mix of psych-rock and Indian influences. *Happy Birthday* would have been huge as a follow-up to *Govinda*, while Alanoud Gigante is a heavenly foil for Mills on OTT country ballad *Stay With Me Tonight*.

With Jay Darlington fired up on keys after years of playing with Oasis and Noel Gallagher, the title track and *Something Dangerous* mine the energy of their debut album *K*. The closing tranquillity of *Give Me Tomorrow* proves Mills can be a calming sage after all. Just keep him from going down too many YouTube rabbit holes and Kula Shaker will be fine. **JE**

SLEATER-KINNEY
LITTLE ROPE

LOMA VISTA

★★★★

Wondering if they were going to continue after 2021's *Path Of Wellness* failed to chart, riot grrrl veterans Sleater-Kinney instead changed their record label and had nearly finished writing their fourth album since reforming in 2015 when Carrie Brownstein's mother and stepfather were killed in a car crash.

The songs remained unchanged, but Brownstein wanted to focus on guitar in the tragedy's aftermath, rather than alternate vocal/guitar duties with Corin Tucker. You can try to pick out signs of Brownstein's grief if you must, but *Little Rope* is simply the duo at their concise best: all 10 songs last 2m 50s to 3m 50s, and the power chords on the closing *Untidy Creature* is as near as it gets to a ballad.

Aided by David Byrne/Sparks producer John Congleton, it's tune-heavy punk at its most infectious. You'd call it punk-pop if Blink-182's unlovely ilk hadn't keelhauled the term. *Needlessly Wild* and *Don't Feel Right* are especially irresistible, but everything here is urgent and ready to storm the barricades.

Crusader threatens to drop the pace, only to soon ramp up with propulsive drumming like The National's rare rowdier moments, while the glam-tinged *Say It Like You Mean It* thrums with the glee of Congleton's recent production clients, Blondie. Impassioned, uplifting and above all catchy as hell, Sleater-Kinney were right to keep on going. **JE**

GRANDADDY
BLU WAV

DANGERBIRD

★★

Grandaddy's second album since reforming and their first since bassist Kevin Garcia died from a stroke shortly after 2017's release of *Last Place*, the title of *Blu Wav* is drawn from Jason Lytle's claim that it mixes bluegrass and New Wave.

Quite where the New Wave influence can be detected is a mystery, as it hasn't made it to the music. Other than a sci-fi swoosh underneath the wordless harmonies in the brief *Let's Put This Pinto On The Moon*, the Californians are at their most conservative on a succession of country ballads.

Lytle is proud of finally incorporating pedal steel into Grandaddy's music. It would have blended into much of their past, but it's oddly bloodless in dominating half of *Blu Wav*, often making them sound like they could be any other Americana band.

Grandaddy were never about escapist nihilism, but they're usually more playful than the suffocating whimsy of *Cabin In My Mind* and the endless trudge of *Nothin' To Lose*. Only the beautiful *Ducky, Boris And Dart* feels like it could become a future live staple, Lytle at his most awed.

Grandaddy have enough credit to allow for a misstep in their catalogue, and the simplicity of *Ducky, Boris And Dart* shows that they don't need to always be adventurous. But the lack of energy is a concern. **JE**

CAST
LOVE IS THE CALL

REPUBLIC

★★★★

Reforming for 2017's middling *Kicking Up The Dust* LP, John Power now assesses that album as Cast kicking the tyres, working out if they could still connect in the studio.

If they were to make more new music rather than take the easy route of nostalgia concerts, the quartet wanted it to properly matter. Produced by Youth, Power views Cast's seventh album as returning him to the energy he had after leaving The La's and before making his second band's debut, *All Change*. It's a bold ambition, but one *Love Is The Call* mostly lives up to.

The title track, *I Have Been Waiting* and *Look Around* at the start of Side Two are especially thrilling, Power sounding as boisterous as the *Fine Time* days fronting a band whose electric pace is more adroitly played than their early period. That experience gels on the closing *Tomorrow Calls My Name*: for a band who were regular touring partners of Oasis, they've belatedly crafted their own *Champagne Supernova*.

Lyrically, Power's concerns remain simple: a belief in humanity and unity, that love really could bring us together. It's not complicated, but it's hard to deny Power's purity, especially sung with the conviction of *Rain That Falls* and *Love You Like I Do*. That purity was there in The La's and, in going back to their spirit, it still shines 35 years on. **JE**

REBECCA FERGUSON
HEAVEN PART II

MINERVA OTO

★★★½

Rebecca Ferguson's initial claim to fame was beating a group called One Direction (whatever happened to them?) in the seventh series of *The X-Factor* in 2010. In the years since, the Liverpool singer has released four albums, shared the stage with Lionel Richie and Andrea Bocelli and, most recently, collaborated on two singles with Nile Rodgers.

The independently released *Heaven Part II* isn't just Ferguson's first full-length since 2016 – it's also being billed as her final studio album. If that does turn out to be the case, she's at least going out on a very respectable note. *Heaven Part II* centres her smoky voice on slinky electro (*Digging For Gold*), reverent R&B (the gospel-influenced *I'm Going To Love You*), funky, upbeat soul (*Diamonds In Her Shoes*), and epic pop anthems (*Shallow Breathing*).

In a full-circle moment, *Heaven Part II* also finds Ferguson reuniting with leading pop tunesmith Eg White, with whom she also co-wrote on the first *Heaven* album in 2011. Their collaborations here feel familiar but fresh, while keeping the album grounded in the present.

Not everything about *Heaven Part II* succeeds: tunes like *Hollywood* and *Found My Voice* are technically beautiful but somewhat nondescript. However, moments like the stuttering jazz and hip-hop-influenced *Run Rebecca* offer an exciting glimpse of where Ferguson could go next – if she wants to. **Annie Zaleski**

SHED SEVEN
A MATTER OF TIME

COOKING VINYL

★★★★

Perennial live favourites since first reforming in 2007, *A Matter Of Time* is only the Britpoppers' second LP since. Produced again by Youth, who helmed 2017's *Instant Pleasures*, the Sheds' sixth album is exactly what they need: virtually all 12 songs sound like instant festival favourites.

Let's Go and *Talk Of The Town* have the same raucous energy as *She Left Me On Friday*, while the mournful *Let's Go Dancing* will have anyone who found something in their eye whenever *Chasing Rainbows* came on the radio belting along by the second chorus. Sure, these choruses are route-one, but that's harder to pull off than tune-free prog excursions, with slow-building *Tripping With You* – featuring standout harmonies from Reverend And The Makers' Laura McClure – showing the Sheds can get smart if they want.

If the daft drug boasting in *F:K:H* plays into their critics' hands, Rick Witter is still convincing as a lost soul coping via hedonistic misadventure. After Alan Leach made a fortune designing pub quiz machines and retired, new drummer Rob Maxfield leads the charge on the more straight-up hard rock of *Kissing California* and Pete Doherty-featuring *Throwaways'* grandiose finale.

As consistently strong as *A Maximum High*, Shed Seven remain an undervalued asset. Any doubters should try dislodging the chorus of Rowetta collaboration *In Ecstasy* after one listen. **JE**

LOVE FAME TRAGEDY
LIFE IS A KILLER

BRIGHT ANTENNA

★★★★

The second solo album from The Wombats' singer Murph is a more personal set, following his 2020 debut, which featured Pixies, Alt-J and Soundgarden. Buoyed by his day-job band confirming their rebirth with a first No.1 LP in 2022, Murph celebrates with an ultrapop workout variously resembling Keane, Haircut 100 and, on *Ain't No Need To Try*'s falsetto frenzy, Scissor Sisters. Lyrically, there are travails about keeping a family together, but the gliding basslines and syncopated grooves mean Murph's vocals are more confident than his doubts would suggest. **JE**

GRUFF RHYS
SADNESS SETS ME FREE

ROUGH TRADE

★★★★

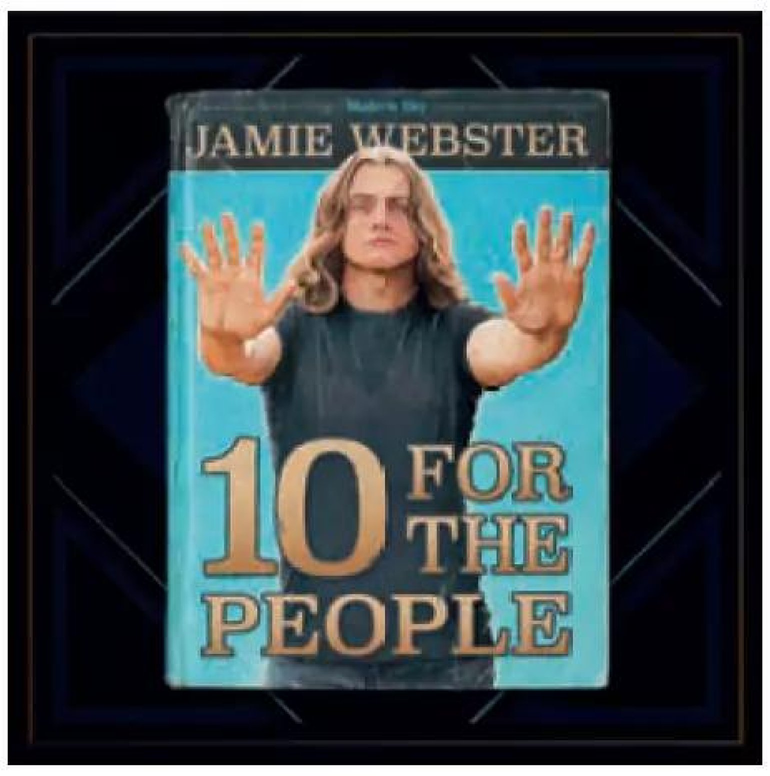
If you're not paying attention, it's easy to think the solo albums of ex-Super Furry Animals frontman Gruff Rhys, who comes across as supremely laid back, constitute a louche canon. But the surface calm is invariably deceptive, as proved by *Sadness Sets Me Free*, via lyrics that touch on melancholy, family life and discontent over how we are governed. Replete with glorious melodies, notably on the title track and *I Tendered My Resignation*, it's a set beautifully mixing a Celtic-Americana-tinged swing with orchestral pop flourishes. **Jonathan Wright**

THE VACCINES
PICK-UP FULL OF PINK CARNATIONS

AWAL

★★★½

Titled after a misremembered lyric from *American Pie*, the indie staples' sixth LP was written while Justin Young was living in L.A., reflecting on a break-up. The few personal ruminations get in the way of his typically zesty skittish escapism. *Lunar Eclipse* and *Another Nightmare* are classic Vaccines bops, while *Sunkissed* is purer pop, seemingly influenced by Young's sideline writing for others. Still sounding fired up, yet also remaining not quite able to convey life's bigger emotions, it's mostly business as usual. **JE**



JAMIE WEBSTER
10 FOR THE PEOPLE

MODERN SKY

★★★★

With a 40,000-capacity Liverpool homecoming stadium show booked for next July, fiery singer-songwriter Jamie Webster's rise is cemented here by a heartwarming third album full of his biggest dreams and bigger choruses. Billy Bragg narrates the carnival air of *Fickle Fran*, rising soul singer Brooke Combe brings joy on *Better Day*, but it's the tender heart at the centre of the poignant *Lovers In The Supermarket* and impassioned fire of the Waterboys mood in *The Boy/The Girl* that shows how Webster got so huge on his own terms. **JE**

SIGMA
LONDON SOUND

3BEAT

★★★

The drum and bass duo who've worked with Ellie Goulding and Take That keep the guests underground on their third album. Sampling *Bitter Sweet Symphony* and *Tom's Diner*, they sometimes try too hard to be cinematic, with the title track seemingly designed to soundtrack a Sky Max gangster drama. It's when they keep the beats simple and punishing, like the hard-hitting *Badman* and *LSD*, that the pair best honour their adopted home. More than a decade in, Sigma can still light up a dancefloor – albeit they sometimes need reminding that it's their primary purpose. **JE**

DYLAN JOHN THOMAS
DYLAN JOHN THOMAS

IGNITION

★★★

A protégé of Gerry Cinnamon who counts Liam Gallagher and Suggs as fans, the Glasgow singer-songwriter has Shack's mix of simple acoustics and emotional complexity in his finest songs. *Fever* is a communal strum, while *What I Need* is a singalong for the ages. With such a sparse accompaniment, other tunes can sound like demos, with *Champs-Élysées* resembling a Courteeners offcut. Thomas' sharp lyrics and the naturalistic charm of his vocals generally carries him through, but more variety next time out would be welcome. **JE**

THE REYTONS
BALLAD OF A BYSTANDER

REYTONS

★★★★

The first act to headline their local Rotherham stadium since T-Rex, the rowdy quartet capitalise on their self-released *What's Rock And Roll?* album reaching No.1 with a more varied third LP. Still specialising in direct indie dancefloor singalongs, they now encompass Feeder anthemics in *Listen*, a *Squirrel And G-Man*-era Happy Mondays strut on *Let Me Breathe* and a heavier Thin Lizzy party on *What She Won't Do*. Throw in the kind of picaresque everyday life chronicles of Madness and it's easy to hear why they are now following in Marc Bolan's footsteps. **JE**

BILL RYDER-JONES
IECHYD DA

DOMINO

★★★★

Fresh from guesting with his old band The Coral and producing Michael Head, Bill Ryder-Jones' fifth album is his most complete work to date. Crucially, it's also his most optimistic. The bittersweet acoustic sway of *Christinha* might be expected, less so the epic anthemics of *Nothing To Be Done*, recalling The Flaming Lips' most mainstream moves. Best of all, *If Tomorrow Starts Without Me* has Ryder-Jones as an irresistible one-man orchestra with a killer uplifting chorus. The title is Welsh for 'Good health' and this is guaranteed to leave you feeling brighter. **JE**

© Getty

PORTISHEAD
ROSELAND NYC LIVE

UMC/ISLAND

★★★★★

A STUNNING LIVE DOCUMENT IS RESCUED FROM BACK CATALOGUE OBSCURITY, GIVING US THE CHANCE TO REVISIT A PIVOTAL EVENT IN THE STORY OF PORTISHEAD

Perhaps because its members have so often spent time working on other projects, the breadth of Portishead's recorded output is wholly out of kilter with the band's vast influence. Between 1994 and 2008, the trio – singer Beth Gibbons, guitarist Adrian Utley and multi-instrumentalist Geoff Barrow – released just three studio albums. A fourth may one day arrive, but don't hold your breath.

Accordingly, any new release from Portishead is noteworthy just for the fact of its existence, even if, as here, you're talking about an expanded version of a live album that won't be available to purchase in physical form until March. (No details of those formats were available as *Classic Pop* went to press.)

Except, of course, *Roseland NYC Live* is far more than a souvenir for fans. It's an LP that's fascinating, fierce and, as so often with Portishead releases, almost seems to rearrange itself, twisting into new shapes, as you listen.

Chronologically, it was recorded in July 1997. By this point, Portishead had long been chafing against the idea of being the trip-hop band it was OK – possibly *de rigueur* – to play at dinner parties. Second album *Portishead* (released two months after the Roseland show) was a record that, without going to the dissonant extremes of the extraordinary *Third*, strongly suggested you pay attention, rather than insinuating its way into your consciousness as *Dummy* had.

By this point, Portishead were confident enough to perform a one-off show in New York in which they were joined onstage by additional musicians, including a brass and string section. Although a couple of tracks were recorded at other shows, it's this concert that made up the bulk of the first audio release of *Roseland*. (Confusingly, its video release featured different tracks.)

A little more than a quarter of a century later, the album has been remastered and expanded, initially for streaming. Three tracks previously available only on the concert film – *Undenied*, *Numb* and *Western Eyes* – have been added, while the Roseland takes of *Sour Times* and *Roads* now also make the cut.

As to whether it was worth all the bother, once again, indisputably yes. In particular, that's because there's a new sense of eavesdropping on a key moment in Portishead's history, of listening to a band stretching and reinventing their material for the room – of jeopardy even. It's revealing that Gibbons has taken to Instagram to talk of it being "a scary and exciting time". This comes across, as does a sense of this nervous energy being channelled by a trio in full and imperious control of their art. **Jonathan Wright**

TINA TURNER
QUEEN OF ROCK 'N' ROLL

PARLOPHONE

★★★½

© Getty

After all the understandable plaudits poured in when Tina Turner died in May this year, it was inevitable that a collection of her work would be put together for the Christmas market.

Available as a 55-track 3CD or 5-LP set (or, if you don't want to mess around, there's a 12-track LP of the biggest hitters), *Queen Of Rock 'n' Roll* rounds up almost all the singles from Tina's solo career. It celebrates the life and legacy of a genuine survivor who, let's face it, went through some really horrible shit to become the superstar she deserved to be.

Whether it was the acid queen or the wild, fright-wigged legend she became best known as, those eras are here. Being a solo affair, there's nothing from her rawer era with her ghastly ex-husband, as the compilation goes from Tina's barnstorming version of *Whole Lotta Love* to a so-so new mix of *Something Beautiful.*

There's absolute magnificence in *Private Dancer, On Silent Wings, Goldeneye* and, of course, *The Best.* There are also the duets where Turner was more than a match for the likes of Rod Stewart, Bryan Adams, Eric Clapton and David Bowie.

The singles which have been overlooked on numerous other Tina comps are here, too, and it's all the better for it.

That said, while this is comprehensive enough to include a somewhat superfluous remix of *What's Love Got To Do With It* by Kygo, it would have been nice if there'd been room for the magnificent *Ball Of Confusion* with BEF. But, as the recent *Tina* documentary showed, there seems to be a peculiar airbrushing from history of the collective who retrieved Turner from The Dumper.

Perhaps a more digestible single CD option might have been handy to join its vinyl companion. In fairness, there's no end of those on the market should you fancy one. Whichever version of Turner you favour, there's plenty of choice here. **Ian Wade**

MILLI VANILLI
THE BEST OF

SONY LEGACY

★★★

© Getty

As charted in Paramount+'s new self-titled *Milli Vanilli* documentary, the career of Rob Pilatus and Fab Morvan reads more like a Biblical parable than a pop handbook: two broke but ambitious dancers who seemingly got their wish when they hooked up with veteran German pop guru Frank Farian, only to end up vilified on an unimaginable scale before Pilatus' fatal drug overdose.

Competent singers though the duo were, Farian basically couldn't be bothered getting their English to the required level to get over his reliably efficient pop.

It's clear that Farian didn't have much time for developing his artists – he made Simon Cowell look like George Martin. But, as this new 35th anniversary compilation shows, Farian also knew how to keep up with current pop trends.

Having mastered vampy disco for Boney M, Farian hired German-based American session singers Brad Howell and John Davis to effectively play Pilatus and Morvan in the recording studio: witness their "Hey, Rob!" "Hi Fab!" chat in the intro to the brassy *More Than You'll Ever Know*, hugely creepy in retrospect.

Helped by writers including Diane Warren and Toby Gad, debut album *All Or Nothing* – reworked for the US as *Girl You Know It's True* a year later – is a brutally efficient mix of R&B, New Jack Swing, shuffle beats and balladry. There were attempts at rap in *Money* and a trashy cover of Deep Purple's *Hush*, but they should be glossed over for decency's sake.

Decades on, the ballads have aged best. Whoever was singing them, there's a reason Milli Vanilli won that Grammy. If you can forget the duo's story, *Girl You Know It's True* and *Blame It On The Rain* are smart slices of heightened emotion. *The Best Of* adds three remixes, but ignores everything beyond the debut, bar post-album finale, the regrettably rapped *Keep On Running.* **John Earls**

VARIOUS
NOW PRESENTS CLASSIC DISCO

NOW

★★★★★

© Getty

People who don't like disco are not to be trusted. That is cold fact. If anyone says to you they have no time for disco, end the conversation immediately. Block and report them forthwith. Because they're just plain wrong.

Looking back at the struggles disco faced from Authentic Music bores, you can understand why it was far more exciting and preferable than The Eagles or any of that nonsense. Back then, rock was a very Western and regional hetero affair, whereas disco was multiracial, multi-sexual, glamorous, extravagant and, above all, *life*. Disco was full of desire, longing, attraction, strings, important synthesizer pulses and ecstasy. No wonder the squares tried to destroy it with dismal – and it should be said, borderline racist – schemes such as the Disco Demolition Derby in 1979, which invited people to blow up disco records because they felt under threat from its decadence. The goons.

To prove how incredible and enduring disco is, Now have herded 80 of its biggest bangers together as a 5LP masterpiece, and it is GLORIOUS: end to end majesticness and wonder. Not only do you get titans such as *Boogie Wonderland*, *Car Wash*, *Use It Up And Wear It Out*, *Le Freak* and *That's The Way (I Like It)*, you get Donna Summer inventing the future on *I Feel Love*.

As has been the case on similar Now boxsets chronicling soul and 70s pop, the Now team pick catnip for scene-heads, in this case slightly less obvious anthems that will have casuals finding themselves instantly on the dancefloor: Space's *Magic Fly*, *Boogie Oogie Oogie* from A Taste Of Honey, Sheila B & Devotion's *Spacer*. All that and Sylvester's peerless *You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)* is here, too. How could it not be?

If you can't dig this then, honey, *Classic Pop* can't dig you. This is essential fare for anyone with a pulse. **IW**

NO-MAN
HOUSEKEEPING: THE OLI YEARS 1990-1994/SWAGGER

ONE LITTLE INDEPENDENT/BURNING SHED

★★★★ / ★★★½

No-Man's 1990 debut single was an unlikely Donovan cover, *Colours*, unwittingly pre-empting trip-hop and tailormade for critics who were fond of ornate, melodramatic descriptions. With Tim Bowness' breathy melancholy and Steven Wilson's arrangements distinguished by dusty beats and violin flourishes, it was moving, elegant, and loosely indicative of their urge to create art-pop in the mould of Japan or Trevor Horn's ambitious ZTT aesthetic.

By 1994, they'd released two albums and a singles collection – including a remixed *Colours* – which maintained this tradition ever more extravagantly, and *Housekeeping* gathers these, plus assorted singles, bonus tracks and radio sessions.

If Wilson now enjoys success both solo and with Porcupine Tree – not to mention as a prolific surround sound mixer of catalogue by acts such as ABC, XTC and Tears For Fears – No-Man, who delivered five further albums, remain below the radar.

A separate compilation entitled *Swagger* – the duo's own, offering late-80s tracks recorded as No Man Is An Island – finds them combining more conventional, sometimes more energetic if unformed sounds.

Lovesighs, however, the 6CD *Housekeeping* boxset's first disc, is where to start. *Heartcheat Pop* and *Drink Judas* are founded upon breakbeats, while *Reich*, an ambient variation on *Days In The Trees*, lingers longest, sampling *Twin Peaks*' Laura Palmer and pointing towards 1993's delicious *Loveblows & Lovecries – A Confession*. Here, *Sweetheart Raw*'s hushed tension and *Heaven's Break*'s reflective nature are set against *Painting Paradise*'s sweeping romance, released as an EP with a thrilling 21-minute instrumental, *Heaven Taste*, included on CD3 with reworks of another breathless single, *Only Baby*.

1994's *Flowermouth* was yet more tender and passionate, not least *You Grow More Beautiful* and *Shell Of A Fighter*. But, though a baker's dozen of radio sessions confirm their live credentials, even as an acoustic outfit, the public resisted. Too late for the 80s, too arty for trip-hop, perhaps their time has finally come with this welcome boxset. **Wyndham Wallace**

GO WEST
DANCING ON THE COUCH

CHRYSALIS

★★★

Sandwiched in-between their two hitmaking phases, Go West's second album *Dancing On The Couch* almost feels like a lost LP. All three singles were paid dust on their 1987 release, each failing to make the UK Top 40. Across the pond, the album only just scraped the Billboard 200. Winning Best British Newcomer at the previous year's BRITs appeared to have been a curse.

This 3CD+1DVD (or 2LP) reissue doesn't exactly make the case that it's a lost classic. The blustering New Wave rock of *I Want To Hear It From You* and *True Colours* are simply inferior retreads of what had gone before. Likewise *Let's Build A Boat*, which was substituted for an indistinguishable sequel to early hit *Don't Look Down* in the Stateside edition, is also included in the second disc of oddities.

The forgotten album, named after a photography book in which a red velvet sofa is transported across America, is far more interesting when it strays from the 'If it ain't broke' formula. *From Baltimore To Paris* is a lush slow dance number that utilises both Pino Palladino's signature fretless bass and Alan Murphy's virtuoso guitar skills. Following Ferry Aid and her Rowan Atkinson duet at *The Secret Policeman's Third Ball*, the cocktail jazz of *The King Is Dead* completed the 1987 trilogy of unlikely guest appearances from Kate Bush.

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It's a similar story with CD2, where perfunctory remixes and demos sit alongside *Don't Be Afraid Of Your Dreams*, a dreamy synth-rock number recorded for the *A Nightmare On Elm Street 4* soundtrack, which allows Peter Cox to fully unleash that brilliantly raspy voice, and B-side *XL5*, a chaotic instrumental that could be mistaken for The Art Of Noise. But it's a Hammersmith Odeon show, captured here on both CD and DVD (the latter also featuring the campaign's four unremarkable videos), that's most likely to have fans adhering to its title. **Jon O'Brien**

SIOBHAN DONAGHY
REVOLUTION IN ME

LONDON

★★★½

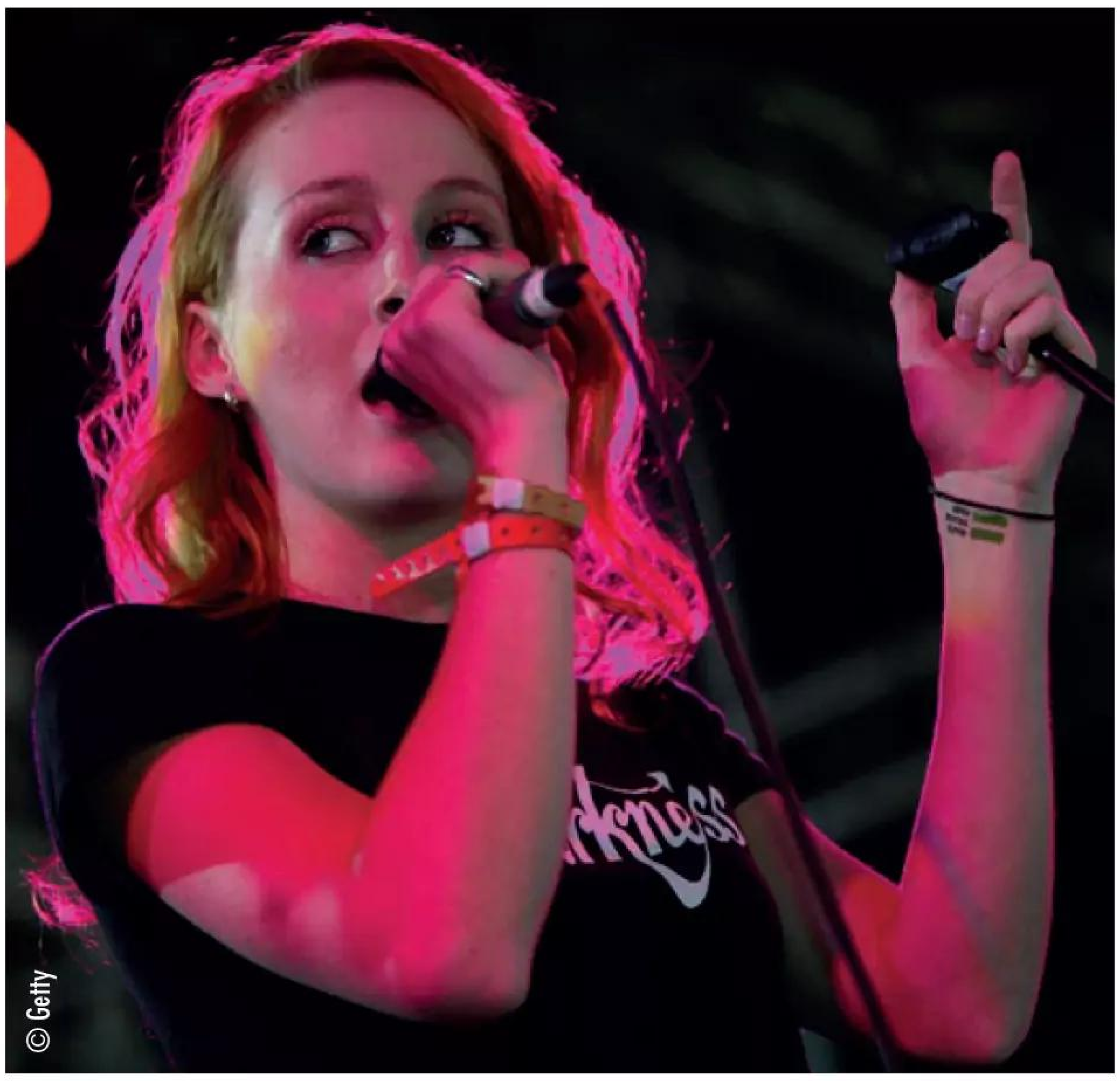
On its release in 2003, former Sugababe Siobhan Donaghy's debut solo album failed to reach the UK Top 100. That doesn't exactly shout that it's worthy of a deluxe 20th anniversary reissue. Yet *Revolution In Me* merits its 2CD and accompanying new-to-vinyl update, as it's long been spoken of by noughties pop students as a lost gem.

If it's not quite a classic, it nonetheless deserves its moment in a more poptivist climate than on its original release, when Donaghy was viewed as Sugababes' Pete Best while her old band were flourishing with Heidi Range.

Still only 19 years old, no wonder Donaghy sounds so wise, given the fallout from leaving Sugababes. First single *Overrated*, a No.19 hit, and *As You Like It* particularly embody the sophistication of Donaghy's Sugababes album *One Touch* two years earlier, confident hook-heavy R&B: that LP's co-producer Cameron McVey also oversaw *Revolution In Me*.

While *Faces*' steel pan-driven reggae lilt is best forgotten, the experiments otherwise allow Donaghy to be even brighter. *Next Human (XY)* and *Suasex* are irresistible earworms that you're never sure where they're going to twist next, while *Dialect*'s clattering electro is a voguish reminder that she could have coped just fine under Richard X's tutelage in Sugababes if she'd wanted, thanks.

The album tails off at the end, the title track and *Iodine* glib girlband-by-numbers mid-paced shrugs that could be from anyone. By then, Donaghy had proved her worth, or at least she deserved to: quite how the classic sweep of second single *Twist Of Fate* failed to make the Top 40 is a mystery for the ages.



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Largely repeating the tracklisting of the original's Collector's Edition, the 2CD adds five B-sides as well as a handful of alternative/radio mixes. The draw here is previously-unreleased songs *Pop Illusion* (a dreamy salsa sway with a heavy bass chorus) and *Fickle* (moody electro trying too hard to replicate what Range's Sugababes were up to.)

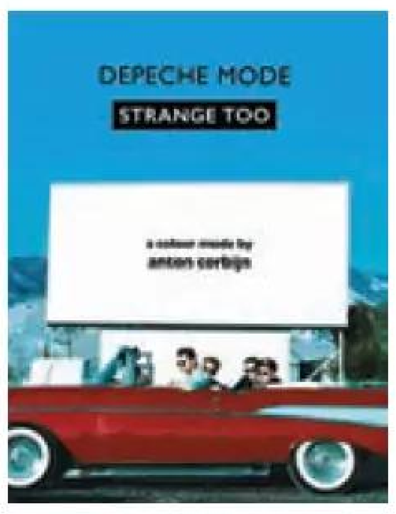
A fine album in its own right, ripe for rediscovering by Sugababes fans awaiting their mythical new album. **JE**

DEPECHE MODE
STRANGE/STRANGE TOO

SONY

★★★★

The Mode and Anton Corbijn really were a match made in Super 8 heaven. Finally out on DVD (and Blu-Ray), *Strange/Strange Too* compiles the original 1988 and 1990 VHS/laserdisc collections featuring the cornerstones of the visual identity the Dutch filmmaker created for the band. They played no small part in their journey from second division synth-poppers to arguably the world's biggest cult act.



The *Strange* promos – from *A Question Of Time* to *Behind The Wheel* – set the band against a collection of dramatic monochrome European landscapes, while *Strange Too* sees Corbijn move into colour for the highlights from *Violator*.

At times, it veers between the pretentious and endearingly daft. There are some staged links between the *Strange* videos that are as baffling as they are excruciating to watch three decades on. It's hard to see *Personal Jesus*, with the band as cowboys in a brothel, as anything more than a rib-tickling piss-take. But *Enjoy The Silence*, with Dave Gahan as King Canute, is proof that one good idea executed well is all you need to create a classic pop promo.

As for the music? Just a brilliant run of singles that are a reminder mid-period Depeche – aside from the arty aspirations and self-consciously pervy videos – were as good as any pop band of that era. **Beth Simpson**

D:REAM
THE BEST THING

NEWSTATE

★★★½

Far more enjoyable a compilation than a duo generally assumed to be one-hit wonders would lead you to expect, D:Ream's Best Of is an overdue reminder that they were a solid pop-rave proposition, before New Labour's appropriation of *Things Can Only Better* torpedoed the rest of their songs for good.

Focusing mainly on debut album *D:Ream On Volume 1*, its seven songs here retain an effervescent bounce, the harmonica-driven

Unforgiven a visceral banger that would have fitted on U2's *Achtung Baby*. Only *I Like It* – oddly like a flat remix of a non-existent better song – and sole ballad *Star* (think track eight on a Gary Barlow solo album) are disappointments. There should have been room for something from Peter Cunnah and Al MacKenzie's two 21st Century reunion albums instead.

The two tunes from Cunnah's 1995 de facto solo LP *World* are a delight, with *Shoot Me With Your Love* uncannily like *Let Me Entertain You* three years early. There are delights among the extras, too: check the demos of unreleased seven-minute songs *Dazed And Confused* and *99%* for industrial experiments where D:Ream offer up their Front 242 side.

Throw in unreleased remixes by Sasha, MK and Leftfield – the latter's Americana take on *Unforgiven* a filmic epic – and they justify two CDs after all. **JE**

KLARK KENT
KLARK KENT

BMG

★★★★

It's one of music's best trivia questions: Which member of The Police first released a solo album? Surprisingly, it's not Sting but drummer Stewart Copeland, who tracked offbeat New Wave under the moniker Klark Kent from the late 1970s.

Even more surprisingly, Klark Kent also reached the chart first: his bratty, punkish single *I Don't Care* peaked at No.48 in the UK in 1978, several weeks before The Police debuted with *Can't Stand Losing You*.

This deluxe edition of Klark Kent's 1980 debut album tacks on non-album singles and a pair of unreleased studio tracks, highlighted by the prog-pop earworm *It's Gonna Rain*. A second disc features a dozen previously unreleased demos.

Copeland handled vocals and played every instrument, including unorthodox noises such as typewriter and kazoo, all of which lends a homespun charm. Unlike releases by other quirky artists of the era, however, *Klark Kent* has aged well. Off-kilter singles *Away From Home*, *Rich In A Ditch* and the frenetic *Too Kool To Kalypso* thrive thanks to Copeland's adventurous musicianship and rhythmic virtuosity.

Klark Kent illustrates how much Copeland drove The Police's early sound and vibe – in particular the laid-back reggae grooves of the instrumental *Grandelinquent* – but the collection succeeds handily on its own merits. **Annie Zaleski**

CARTER THE UNSTOPPABLE SEX MACHINE
1992: THE LOVE ALBUM

CHRYSALIS

★★★★

Pop historians tend to write off Carter USM's chart-topping, Glastonbury-headlining success as a baffling aberration on the road from grunge to Britpop. And sure, the hair and shorts were certainly... a choice. But if this reissue of Jim Bob and Fruitbat's biggest-selling LP proves anything, it's that the duo's music is long overdue a re-evaluation, also afforded by the similarly full reissue of the preceding *30 Something*.

From infectious punk anthems such as Top 10 hit *The Only Living Boy In New Cross* to the fairground waltz of *England*, *1992: The Love Album* blends hooky tunes and witty wordplay to create a caustic state-of-the-nation survey that, like Jim Bob's recent solo output, puts the student bar scribblings of Idles firmly in the shade. Though, there's no denying the overactive drum machine dates the album almost as much as its title.

As well as the remastered original, this 3CD set features B-sides and non-album tracks – also included on the 2LP edition – plus a BBC *Live In Norwich Sound City* show and that bill-topping Glastonbury set, while a bonus DVD pairs a VHS documentary with three *Top Of The Pops* performances, all with new commentaries. The result is an album that fully deserves your love. **Paul Kirkley**

VIOLENT FEMMES
VIOLENT FEMMES

CRAFT

★★½

For casual fans: yes, the Wisconsin punks' debut is the album with *Blister In The Sun* on. Reissued for its 40th anniversary, and with the Femmes back touring despite a 2007 lawsuit from bassist Brian Ritchie against singer Gordon Gano over their biggest hit's use in a Wendy's advert, here's chance for newcomers to discover what else they had going on. Truth is, not much.

A classic example of a band constantly refining one idea, only twanging ballad *Confessions* varies the *Blister* formula any. Gano sounds uncertain, the band anonymous, the song shrugs into nothing after five long minutes. *Prove My Love* immediately returns them to the familiar jittery drums and wheedling vocals that serves them well.

Gano's distinctive whine can get uncomfortable: *Add It Up*'s proto-incel pleas for sex have aged horribly. *To The Kill* just sounds like the band are tuning up at the start of rehearsals.

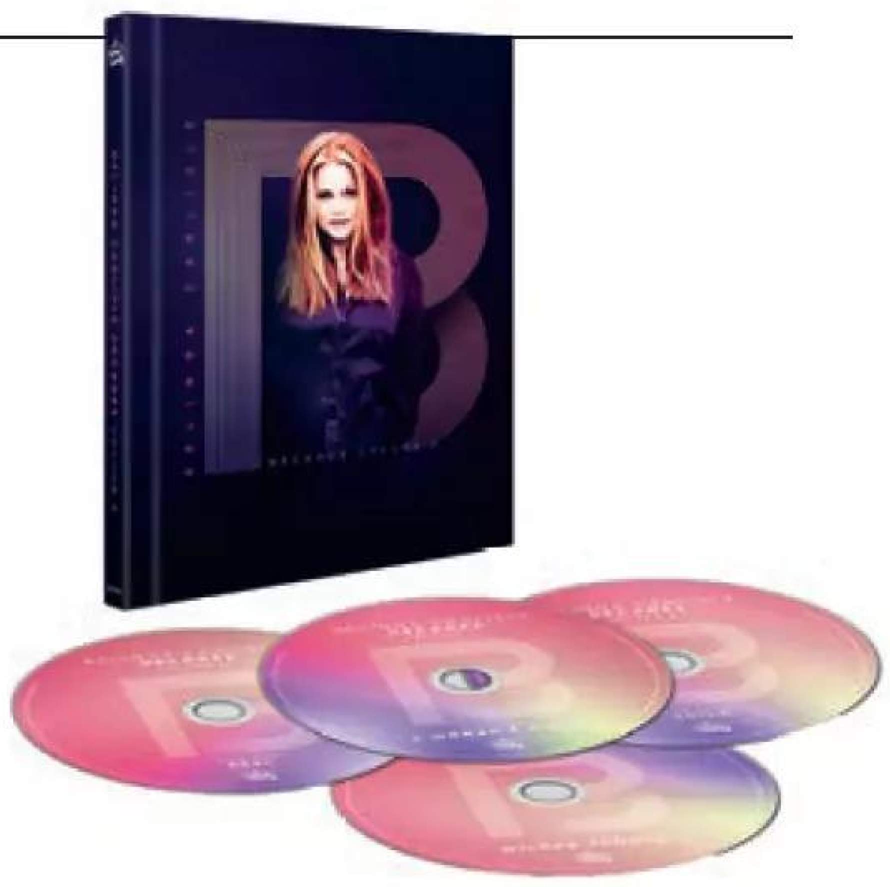
For diehards, the 2CD/3LP reissue is decent, especially the boxset housing the vinyl edition: an album each for the original, 10 demos and 12 live songs across three gigs, plus a 7" of early single *Ugly*.

It's easy to detect Violent Femmes' influence on the likes of Blink-182 and Fall Out Boy. Whether that's a good thing is up for debate. **JE**

BELINDA CARLISLE
DECADES VOLUME 2

EDSEL

★★★★



Since being inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame with The Go-Go's in 2021, Belinda Carlisle has turned her attention to her solo catalogue. Last year, Carlisle bundled her first four solo albums together as *Decades Volume 1* and released half-speed remastered, heavyweight vinyl reissues of 1987's *Heaven On Earth* and 1989's *Runaway Horses*.

This year has seen the arrival of similar vinyl editions of 1991's *Live Your Life Be Free* and 1993's *Real*, and now a second extra-free 4CD compilation, *Decades Volume 2*, assembling Carlisle's albums from *Real* through to her most recent studio set, 2017's *Wilder Shores*.

It's a fascinating stretch, which finds the vocalist going in some surprising directions – *Wilder Shores* pairs yoga chants with contemporary melodies – while settling into a sophisticated pop vein that's far different from the punkish Go-Go's. That's most evident on 2007's excellent *Voila*, where Carlisle reverently covers French songs by the likes of Serge Gainsbourg and Édith Piaf. However, the two 1990s records included here are worth revisiting, too, particularly 1996's *A Woman & A Man*. The soaring Top 10 hits *In Too Deep* and *Always Breaking My Heart* – the latter written by Roxette's Per Gessle – are both superb reminders of Carlisle's pop-rock supremacy. **AZ**

SEAN ROWLEY PRESENTS
GUILTY PLEASURES: BEST BEFORE 1979

DEMON

★★★

It's 20 years since DJ Sean Rowley popularised the notion of guilty pleasures. The term seemed clunky even back then, and it hasn't aged well. However, one of its underlying ideas – that some great pop records get, if not quite lost, at least shoved to the back of record collections as being a bit naff – is true.

In which case, around half the songs on this 70-track 4CD (or cutdown 29-song 2LP) of singles from the 70s have been unfairly maligned, because there are some absolute classics here. For example, CD1, subtitled *MW: All The Hits And More*, finds space for a clutch of British hits, including prime ELO with *Sweet Talkin' Woman*, the glorious *Hold On To Love* by Peter Skellern (MOR's version of Bill Fay) and Helen Reddy's *Hammer House Of Horror* episode in pop song form, *Angie Baby*.

The other discs are similarly loosely themed, devoted to *AM: Pop Goes Smooth, FM: No Static* and *LW: No Hit Wonders*. But they're rather more uneven in quality, for all that you'll find such gems as Leo Sayer's seriously funky *Easy To Love*.

On the downside, there are simply too many songs, so quality control in the selections sometimes slips. But in a sense, that's the point: just because you don't like a track here, it doesn't necessarily mean it's not worth excavating. **JW**

VARIOUS
NOW YEARBOOK 88 EXTRA / NOW 12" 80s: 1982 (PART 1) / NOW EIGHTIES DANCEFLOOR: DISCO & ELECTRO

NOW

★★★★★ / ★★★★★ / ★★★★★

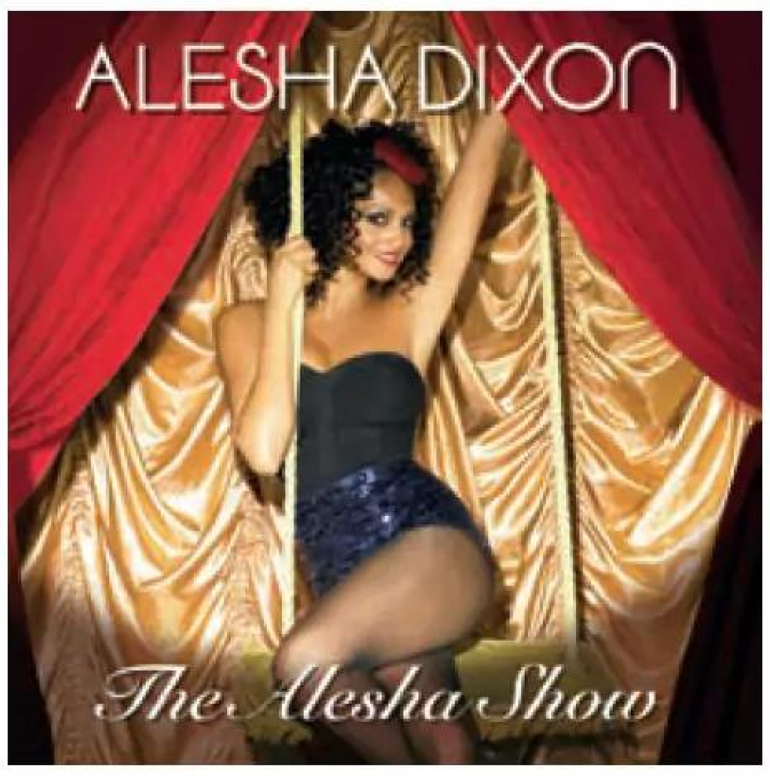
If you're thinking after Now's spectacular 2023 that they'll put their feet up, the answer is a firm 'No, they jolly well aren't'. *1988 Yearbook Extra* scoops up another 60 smashes proving it was one of *the* best pop years, with magic such as *Superfly Guy, Domino Dancing, Doctorin' The House* plus Münchener Freiheit's blubsome *Keeping The Dream Alive* and David Sylvian's swooning *Orpheus*. Continuing their *12" 80s* range with *1982 Part 1* with 48 full-lengths and reswizzles such as The Human League's pounder *Mirror Man*, ABC's luxuriant *The Look Of Love*, Associates' strident *Club Country* among the top tier crackers – pure joy from end to end. And, oh boy, is the 29-track double vinyl *Now 80s Dancefloor: Disco & Electro* an absolute treat. Ask yourself: can you mess with an album that contains Shannon's *Let The Music Play*, SOS Band's *Just Be Good To Me*, Evelyn King's *Love Come Down*, and Indeep's *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life*? No. No you can't. **IW**

TIM FINN & PHIL MANZANERA
VINYL BOXSET

BFD

★★★½

Many lockdown albums were melancholy and introspective affairs. But by no means all, as the two socially distanced collaborations between Tim Finn of Split Enz/Crowded House fame and Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera proved. Both 2021's *Caught By The Heart* and 2022's *The Ghost Of Santiago* came replete with Latin rhythms and a kind of anticipatory joy that one day the world would open up again. Excuse enough to pick up this limited boxset that also includes newer EP, *Viento En Popa*. **JW**



ALESHA DIXON
THE ALESHA SHOW

WARNER

★★★★

She's been a likeable presence on TV for so long, it's easy to forget that Alesha Dixon was once pretty good at her pop star day-job, too. This vinyl reissue of her second post-Mis-Teeq solo LP is certainly a reminder of Dixon's versatility. Whatever style is thrown at her, whether it's the big band swing of hit *The Boy Does Nothing*, the 60s-influenced Xenomania production *Cinderella Shoe*, or Diane Warren ballad *Do You Know The Way It Feels*, Dixon proves adept at them all. You can't help wishing that she would give pop another go. **BS**

COCTEAU TWINS
MILK AND KISSES

UMC/PROPER

★★★★

Milk And Kisses' relatively harmonious inception suggested Cocteau Twins had survived the turbulence of 1993's predecessor *Four-Calendar Café*. But within a year, the trio were no more. Their eighth LP, reissued on vinyl, remains a beguiling send-off, marrying Liz Fraser's ethereal tones with Robin Guthrie's gossamer guitars across 10 tracks. Recorded a year before his death, Jeff Buckley tribute *Rilkean Heart* packs an emotional punch, while the backwards-sung *Violaine* and operatics of *Eperdu* prove that few could make the unintelligible sound so profound. **JO**

BLACK BOX RECORDER
ENGLAND MADE ME

CHRYSALIS

★★★★

Recently given a new audience via Billie Eilish's patronage, the debut by Luke Haines' pop offshoot is reissued for its 25th anniversary on vinyl, a bonus 10" adding six B-sides. Designed to mock Britpop's bombast, only to arrive when Blur and Pulp were howling into the void, Haines and John Moore's sinister minimalism was perfectly offset by Sarah Nixey's mordant vocals, all classically English hauteur and pitch black humour. Come for the chilling cover of *Uptown Top Ranking*, stay for *Kidnapping An Heiress* and *Child Psychology*'s wintry charms. **JE**

WIZZARD
THE SINGLES COLLECTION

CHERRY RED

★★★½

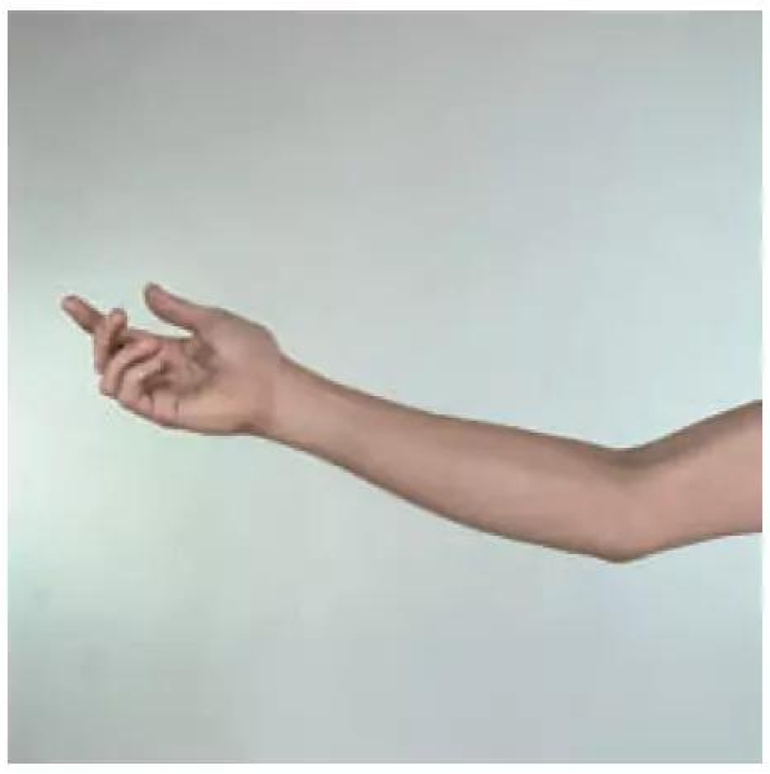
Fresh from The Move, Roy Wood invented Wizzard, which fused Spectoresque bombast and nostalgia for early rock'n'roll with glam. He also co-invented and abandoned ELO, as well as painting a large star on his head and having vast hair – Wood did it *all*. *The Singles Collection* features singles and B-sides from both Wizzard and The Wizzo Band, this 22-track double-CD finding room for some of the most exciting records ever made in *See My Baby Jive*, *Angel Fingers*, *Ball Park Incident* as well as the deathless *I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday*. **IW**

PLASTIKMAN
SHEET ONE

MUTE

★★★★

Complete with its controversial acid blotting paper sleeve, *Sheet One* was revolutionary in bringing minimalism to the then frenetic sound of techno in 1993. The first in a series of vinyl reissues for Richie Hawtin's alias, Plastikman's debut has an emotional heft in the slow-build shivers of *Drp* and *Koma*. For all its atmospherics, *Sheet One* still packs a punch, with the menacing *Helikopter* and appropriately squelchy *Glob* remaining able to deposit the unwary listener into the middle of next week. Finally back out on digital, too, Plastikman's thrills are the real deal. **JE**



SPIRITUALIZED
AMAZING GRACE

FAT POSSUM

★★★½

Eager to avoid the four-year gestation of 2001's gospel-heavy *Let It Come Down* LP, in 2003 Spiritualized's Jason Pierce opted for a more spontaneous approach to his band's fifth studio album. Recorded in just three weeks, *Amazing Grace* is certainly rough and ready, with *This Little Life Of Mine* kicking off in filthy stoner fashion and *She Kissed Me (It Felt Like A Hit)* exhibiting a Stooges-like energy. There's more grit in *Never Goin' Back* and fury in *Cheapster* but, as usual, the band are best at their most awed (*Oh Baby*) or intimate (*Lay It Down Slow*). **WW**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
CONTROL I'M HERE: ADVENTURES ON THE INDUSTRIAL DANCEFLOOR

CHERRY RED

★★★★

If you fancy a 3CD of tunes that sound like they've replaced drums with car parts, then *Control I'm Here* features literal bangers from Nitzer Ebb, Age Of Chance, Front 242 and more from the clankier end of pop. The roar of the big machine comes with The Sisters Of Mercy's *Lucretia My Reflection*, plus there's pre-rave Shamen with *Christopher Mayhew Says* and Renegade Soundwave's dub skank *Cocaine Sex*. Connecting various flavours showing inspiration for Balearic and big beat, this is a very welcome compilation. **IW**

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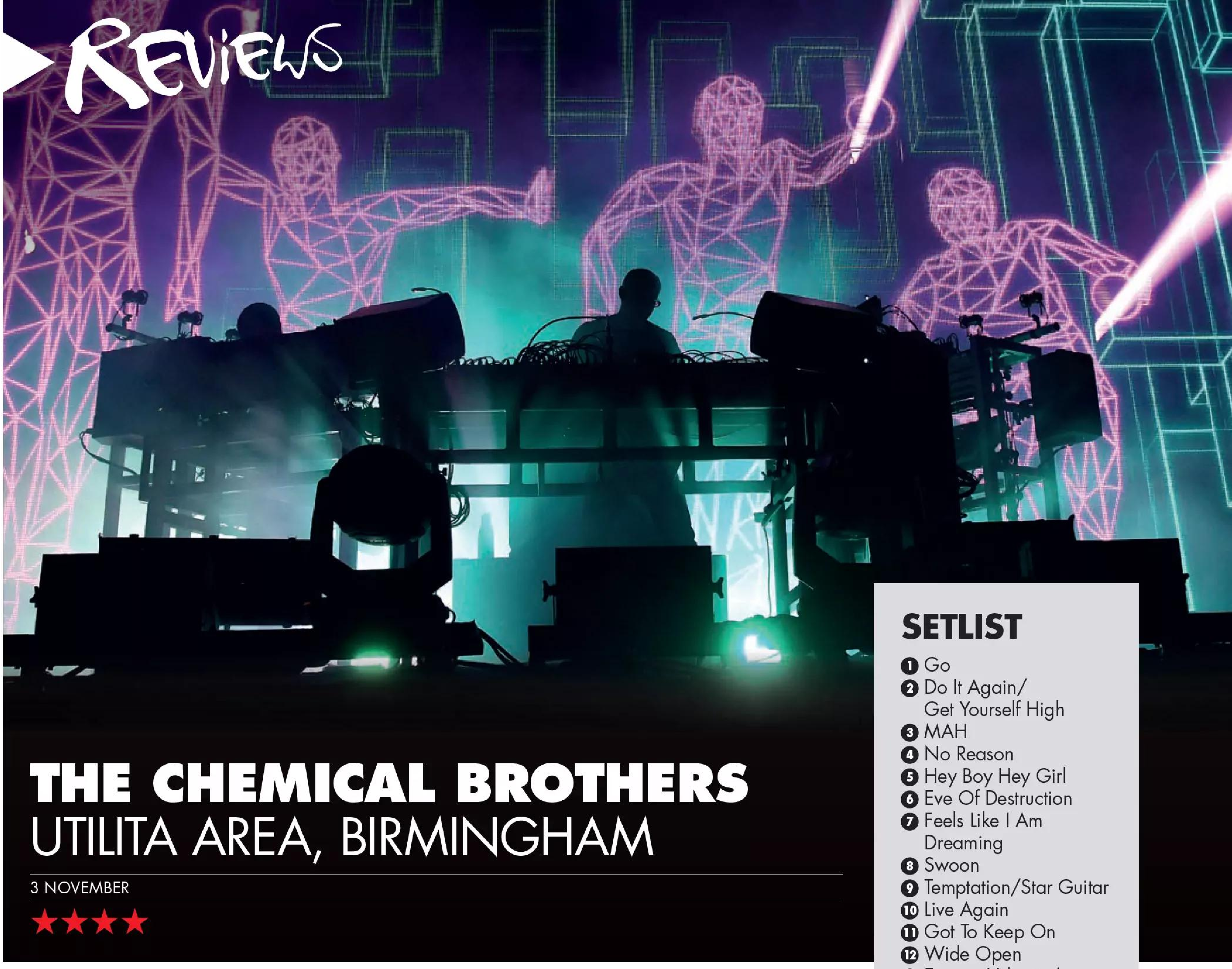
29 LEEDS O2 ACADEMY
30 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY
31 BOURNEMOUTH O2 ACADEMY
APRIL
04 MANCHESTER O2 VICTORIA WAREHOUSE
05 NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY
06 LONDON TROXY
07 SOUTHEND CLIFFS PAVILION
10 SHEFFIELD THE OCTAGON
11 CAMBRIDGE CORN EXCHANGE
13 LIVERPOOL MOUNTFORD HALL
14 BRIGHTON DOME



© Getty

THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS
UTILITA AREA, BIRMINGHAM

3 NOVEMBER

★★★★

THE SUPERSTAR DJ DUO ARE BACK WITH A BRAND NEW STUDIO ALBUM, *FOR THAT BEAUTIFUL FEELING*, AND VIA A MULTI-SENSORY NIGHT OF BLOCK ROCKIN' BEATS

There's a popular misconception, too often repeated in talking-head documentaries, that the 1990s were all about Britpop. As many of us who were there know all too well, that's far from the full story, with the decade also producing a dance music explosion as club culture truly took hold. One of the leading acts to emerge from that fertile period was The Chemical Brothers, who comfortably furrowed their own path and were keenly fêted by both the electronic dance music and guitar camps (hence those great remixes and collaborations with The Charlatans, Oasis' Noel Gallagher and Manic Street Preachers etc).

A quarter of a century later and the duo remain one of a handful of acts from that club generation to flourish with this year's 10th studio LP, *For That Beautiful Feeling*, deservedly earning a raft of rave reviews (no pun intended), including a four-star vote from *Classic Pop*.

There is a through line from the precision of Kraftwerk to the euphoria of *I Feel Love*, via New Order and the eccentricities of The KLF, right up to uni friends turned 'Brothers', Ed Simons and Tom Rowlands – and that line remains as clear today as it ever did.

Tonight gets off to a strong start. Right from *Born In The Echoes*' poppy *Go*, it's almost non-stop, as tracks slide seamlessly into each other, including *MAH* (with its 'Mad as hell' refrain), *No Reason*, the still solid *Hey Boy Hey Girl*, and recent *No Geography* highlight *Eve Of Destruction*.

All come accompanied by quirky stunning visuals that dominate the stage, featuring such delights as a disturbing giant blue-faced demon, swirling purple and green majorettes, and a clash between various neatly designed low-rent Power Rangers rejects.

As the hour mark looms, there's time for a brief pause, allowing Ed and Tom – overshadowed by the giant screens and barely visible behind banks of equipment – to briefly step out to enjoy all the adulation before returning to their workstations, and the second half of the show.

It's another relentless mix. Dazzling. Precise. Bangers sometimes seem to barely get started before firing off in another direction, with tracks from *No Geography* and *For That Beautiful Feeling* standing comfortably alongside the Chems' old skool back catalogue classics.

And the inventive visuals continue to amuse, intrigue and hypnotise. When two giant laser beam-blasting toy robots emerge from billowing smoke at the sides of the stage, the joy in the arena is plain for all to see.

The set culminates in the dark *Galvanize*, less sophisticated *Song To The Siren*, a snatch of *C-H-E-M-I-C-A-L* and weighty *Block Rockin' Beats*, a twanging percussive rollercoaster that still punches hard. Then on to the encore – two recent numbers and a swirling *The Private Psychedelic Reel*, a late-90s classic from *Dig Your Own Hole* – and suddenly, their expertly selected and brilliantly polished two-hour assault on the senses is over, leaving us with just a flashing message juddering on the screens: "Love is all."

There's nothing subtle about tonight's show – it's loud, it's bass-heavy, it's brash. Would you want it any other way? **Dave Freak**

SETLIST

1. Go
2. Do It Again/ Get Yourself High
3. MAH
4. No Reason
5. Hey Boy Hey Girl
6. Eve Of Destruction
7. Feels Like I Am Dreaming
8. Swoon
9. Temptation/Star Guitar
10. Live Again
11. Got To Keep On
12. Wide Open
13. Escape Velocity/ The Golden Path
14. Dig Your Own Hole/ Under The Influence/ Free Yourself/Get Up On It Like This
15. Saturate/Believe
16. Goodbye
17. Elektrobank/Three Little Birdies Down Beats/ Setting Sun
18. Chemical Beats
19. Galvanize/ Song To The Siren/ C-H-E-M-I-C-A-L
20. Block Rockin' Beats

ENCORE

21. No Geography
22. The Darkness That You Fear
23. The Private Psychedelic Reel

HUGH CORNWELL
JANUARY 2024
17 BURY ST EDMUNDS THE APEX
18 NEWCASTLE BOILER SHOP
19 GLASGOW QMU
20 HOLMFIRTH PICTUREDROME
24 BRIGHTON CONCORDE
25 ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL
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05.05 LEEDS BRUDENELL
10.05 BURY ST EDMUNDS APEX
11.05 BIRMINGHAM ASYLUM
17.05 CARDIFF TRAMSHED
18.05 NEWBURY ARLINGTON ARTS
19.05 EXETER PHOENIX
24.05 SOUTHAMPTON 1865
25.05 LONDON DINGWALLS
31.05 GLASGOW ÒRAN MÓR
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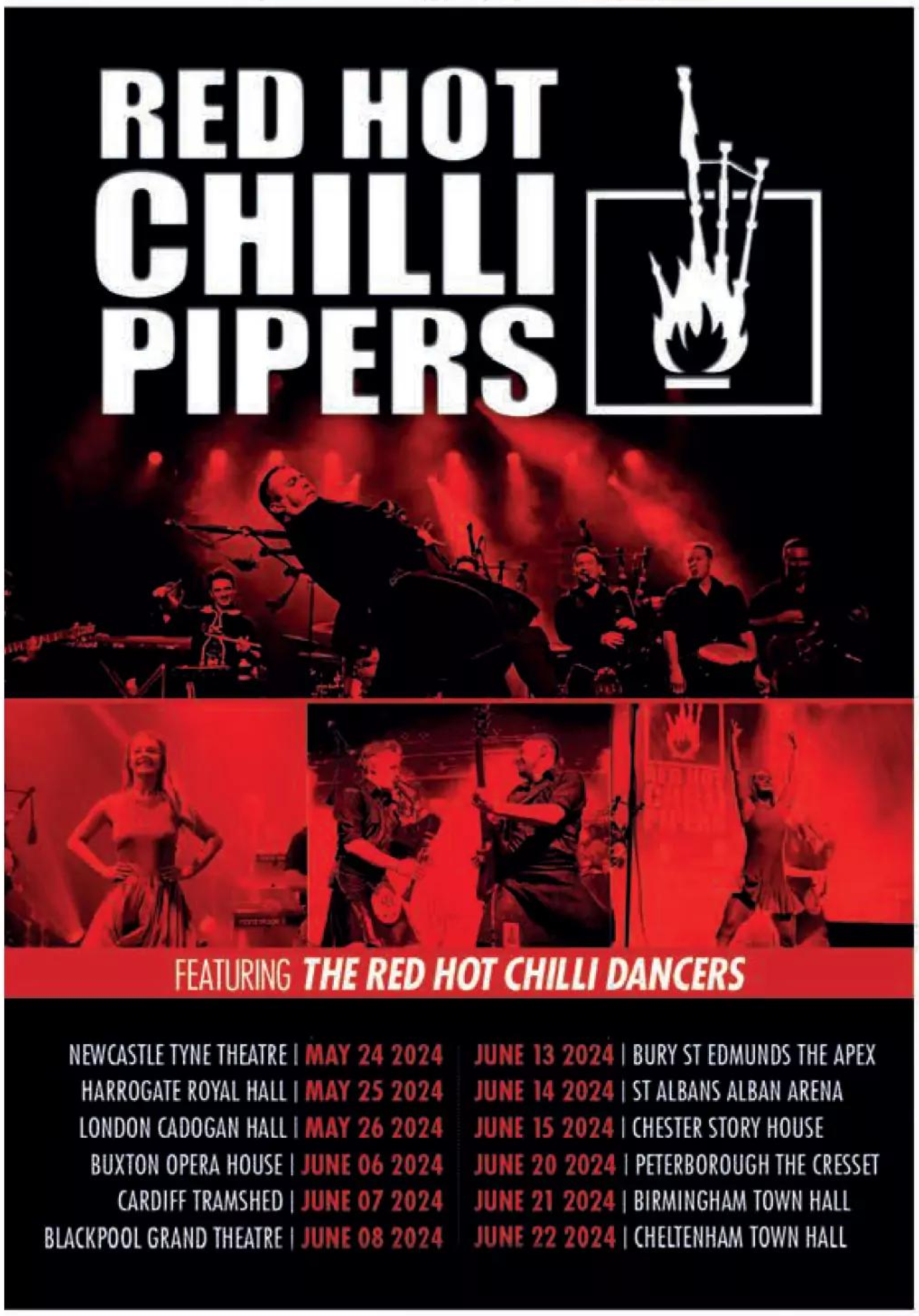
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HARROGATE ROYAL HALL | MAY 25 2024
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CARDIFF TRAMSHED | JUNE 07 2024
BLACKPOOL GRAND THEATRE | JUNE 08 2024
JUNE 13 2024 | BURY ST EDMUNDS THE APEX
JUNE 14 2024 | ST ALBANS ALBAN ARENA
JUNE 15 2024 | CHESTER STORY HOUSE
JUNE 20 2024 | PETERBOROUGH THE CRESSET
JUNE 21 2024 | BIRMINGHAM TOWN HALL
JUNE 22 2024 | CHELTENHAM TOWN HALL

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SUNDERLAND FIRE STATION 13TH APRIL
18TH APRIL LYTHAM LOWTHER PAVILION
19TH APRIL CORBY CORE AT THE CUBE
20TH APRIL STOCKTON ARC
25TH APRIL NORWICH EPIC
26TH APRIL NORTHWICH MEMORIAL HALL
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HUNDRED MILE HIGH CITY AND THE DAY WE CAUGHT THE TRAIN.
PHOTO CREDIT LAWRENCE WATSON

© Dave Freak

HOLLY JOHNSON
SYMPHONY HALL, BIRMINGHAM

25 OCTOBER

★★★

THE FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD FRONTMAN DUSTS OFF HIS LEATHER JACKET TO SPIN THROUGH THE BAND'S BACK CATALOGUE AND HIS SOLO CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

May's unexpected Frankie Goes To Hollywood Eurovision 2023 reunion was both exciting and disappointing in equal measure: exciting, as it marked the first time the full band had played together since splitting 36 years before; but disappointing because they performed just one song, and to date at least, there's been no confirmation of any more.

So it's down to frontman Holly Johnson to maximise on the wave of renewed Frankie interest with just seven dates to mark 40 years since the remarkable *Relax* shook the world and what he claims to be the 35th anniversary of his debut solo album *Blast*, although by our maths, we make it a less rounded 34 years.

The night starts strongly as Holly kicks off with a double-Frankie whammy – *Warriors Of The Wasteland* and *Welcome To The Pleasuredome* – followed by *Blast* standout, *Love Will Come*.

"I miss *Crossroads*!" he declares, referencing the old Brum-set soap before a jaunty *Americanos* ("Takes me back to *Top Of The Pops*," coos the singer) and more recent *In And Out Of Love* ("From *Europa*... that one person bought," he adds), then it's back to Frankie-land for a muscular *Rage Hard*.

Perfume, *Atomic City*, the gentler *Heaven's Here* and a breezy *Love Train* (quoting Joan Armatrading's *Love And Affection*) underline the more overtly pop direction that Holly followed after FGTH's rockier second opus, although the lighter vibe is briefly pushed to one side for *This Was Me* – a showstopping cut from the *Everybody's Talking About Jamie* soundtrack to which Holly brings bittersweet nostalgia combined with a genuine emotional weight.

Then, before you know it, things are winding up with a FGTH quadruple-bill – final 'flop' single *Watching The Wildlife*, a throbbing *Relax* ("Are you ready for the money shot?" Johnson enquires), and the Cold War-inspired classic *Two Tribes* – before the night concludes with a resplendent *The Power Of Love*. "This is my favourite song – and it's not just for Christmas, it's for life," says Johnson to a wave of hugging in the crowd.

It's a song that's impossible to follow, so Holly doesn't. "Bless you," he says, disappearing.

Thanks to a crack band, and musical tech advances, tonight's FGTH material in particular is pristine and even *Blast*'s slighter moments also sound strong, while Holly has no problems giving *The Power Of Love* the vocal attention that it rightly deserves.

However, the show never quite truly ignites, with the vast majority of the audience remaining seated until *Relax* and Holly's insistence that "You're going to have to get up this time!"

That visible lack of excitement could perhaps have been remedied with bigger production, which relies here on fairly basic lighting for such a large show, and a single video screen.

In these days of sequenced lighting tricks, Holly wandering around the stage with a portable smoke machine and waving a lamp while singing "Hit me with those laser beams" doesn't quite cut it. A good night, and a fine career-spanning setlist, but not the big blast (or bang) that it could have been. **Dave Freak**

SETLIST

1. Warriors Of The Wasteland
2. Welcome To The Pleasuredome
3. Love Will Come
4. Americanos
5. In And Out Of Love
6. Rage Hard
7. Perfume
8. Atomic City
9. Heaven's Here
10. Love Train
11. This Was Me
12. Watching The Wildlife
13. Relax
14. Two Tribes

ENCORE

15. The Power Of Love

KARMA
BOY GEORGE
BLINK PUBLISHING

★★★★½

When picking up someone's third autobiography, it is often with a sense of 'What can be said that we don't already know?', particularly when 1995's *Take It Like A Man* is one of the definitive celebrity memoirs. George addresses this in the preface, explaining that maturity and wisdom offer a very different perspective on retrospection, and this becomes apparent almost immediately. Scores are undoubtedly settled, though it is himself that George is hardest on throughout, accepting responsibility and looking at things from the viewpoint of others, displaying a self-awareness he had previously lacked.

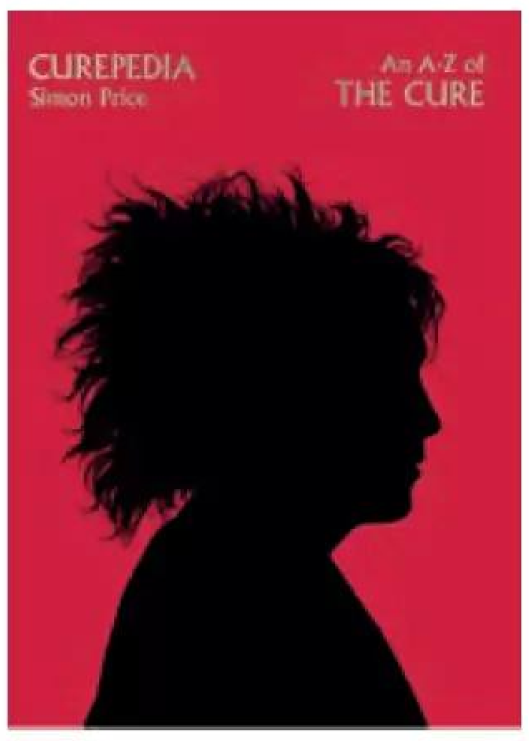
Nonetheless, *Karma* is a huge amount of fun, packed with both crazy characters and hilarious anecdotes. The excess of the 80s is epitomised by trips on Concorde to party in New York with Warhol treated as casually as an Uber to Wetherspoons. Close encounters of the celebrity kind are shared with candour, checking egos where needed (Janet Jackson, it turns out, was indeed Nasty to George), though told with a wink and a smile instead of the vitriolic ramblings that made previous memoir *Straight* so unpleasant.

As witty and truthful as you'd expect from such an engaging storyteller, Boy George's wild ride from punk to pop stardom and prison to primetime TV is relentless. Celebrating highs and examining the teachings of the lows, *Karma* emerges as a fascinating portrait of an enduring icon. **Mark Lindores**

CUREPEDIA: AN A-Z OF THE CURE
SIMON PRICE
WHITE RABBIT

★★★★½

As another year passes without that now elusive new Cure album, fans are being rewarded for their patience by Simon Price, who has penned the ultimate guide to Robert Smith & co in *Curepedia*. As the title suggests, Price's book is a complete anthology of the band, from *A Forest* to *Zoology* and everything – and we mean everything – in between.



A veritable rabbit hole of trivia pertaining to the group, Price embroiders facts, mythology and academia to create a rich tapestry of The Cure. Delving so much deeper than a traditional song-by-song guide to their back catalogue (though it serves as that, too), entries also include the inspiration and influences behind their music and iconic visuals. Aside from the various line-ups, everyone that has played a role in the band, be it an untouchable icon, a location, a piece of film or literature, or producers – all garner a mention.

Beautifully written and meticulously researched, Price's passion for his subject is obvious, relishing the chance to take a deep dive into the work he evidently reveres. Whether you're an aficionado, as the author so clearly is, or someone who is merely Cure-curious, this beautifully presented book contains a wealth of information and insight to satisfy both camps. A stunning tribute to the alt-rock icons. **ML**

NEW ROMANTICS: FROM BILLY'S TO THE PEOPLE'S PALACE
SHEILA ROCK
MOONBOY

★★★★

As one of the most creatively fertile movements in music and fashion, the New Romantics in the early 80s exuded style *and* substance. Following on from glam and punk, this colourful collective posed and preened for anyone that would point a camera at them. Photographer Sheila Rock was in the thick of it – a significant chronicler of the scene. As her vibrant images made their way into *The Face*, her lens proved a gateway to success for some of the definitive musicians, designers, photographers, stylists and artists of the next decade and beyond.

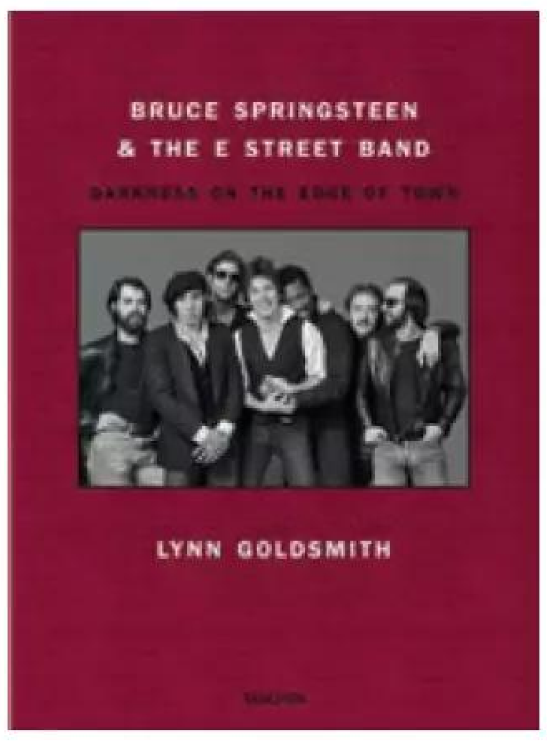
New Romantics, her stunning reportage of London's nocturnal playground, takes in legendary nightspots such as Billy's, The Blitz, The People's Palace and Taboo. Even Finsbury Park tube station is transformed into an otherworldly entity thanks to the outlandish club kids out on the town. Steve Strange, Boy George, Rusty Egan and Princess Julia are all captured in theatrical get-ups, blurring the lines of gender, race and sexuality with their elaborate looks.

Aside from her documentary of London's nightlife, the book includes Rock's early press shots of Depeche Mode, Visage and Ultravox as well as portraits immortalising Judy Blame, Leigh Bowery and Trojan. Enriched with commentary by Dylan Jones, *New Romantics* is a superb testament to the originality and creativity of one of pop culture's greatest eras. **ML**

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN & THE E STREET BAND: DARKNESS ON THE EDGE OF TOWN
LYNN GOLDSMITH
TASCHEN

★★★½

In 1978, photographer Lynn Goldsmith joined Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band during a pivotal time in their career – the recording, promotion and tour of the classic album, *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*. As explained by The Boss himself in the foreword, it was a time of frustration due to a lengthy battle with his former manager that essentially silenced him for three years. Goldsmith's lens captured Bruce and the band as they readied the record that would regain the momentum they'd built up with *Born To Run*.



Shot in the studio, onstage, on the tour bus, in hotel rooms and backstage, these photos provide a unique insight into Bruce's world and perfectly capture the grit and drive of her subject. Dressed down in his everyman uniform of denim, boots and leather jacket, the superstar-in-waiting is shot with a bandaged hand, the result of punching a wall out of frustration when unable to reproduce the music in his mind. Further proof of his dedication is the omnipresent boombox and cassette recordings of shows he'd play back to improve.

A backstage pass to one of Bruce's greatest LPs, the live photography captures the energy that would pack stadiums contained in tiny theatres for the last time. Although a fantastic memento of a man on the cusp of fame, its hefty price tag ensures it's one for purists only. **ML**

CLASSIC POP MOMENTS

ALL SAINTS SCORE THEIR FIRST UK NO.1 WITH *NEVER EVER*

11 JANUARY 1998

Shaznay Lewis, Melanie Blatt and sisters Nicole and Natalie Appleton had already notched up a Top 5 hit with *I Know Where It's At* in the autumn of 1997 before *Never Ever* became the group's first No.1, and one of their defining songs.

Penned by founding member Lewis, along with co-writers Robert Jazayeri and Sean Mather, *Never Ever* was released on 10 November 1997, just two weeks before their debut album hit record shelves. It was the second of five singles to be spun from the five times platinum-selling eponymous LP, three of which would peak at No.1.

Though Lewis had written the song, it was a version made without her that the other three members had presented to London Records. When the label's head asked the trio who had written it, "they were forced to come back and get me," Lewis told *The Independent* in 2004. "Looking back on it, that was pretty low. I think that's why the whole time I knew that if I didn't write I'd be out on my ear."

Never Ever debuted at No.3 in the UK, rising to No.1 for one week only, though it would stay in the Top 10 for 15 weeks. The single was also a hit in the US, peaking at No.4 on the Billboard Hot 100.

It remains All Saints' biggest-selling single and won the group two BRIT Awards for Best British Single and Best British Video. "I never believed that so much good could come out of such a bad situation," its composer said in her acceptance speech. **Steve O'Brien**

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